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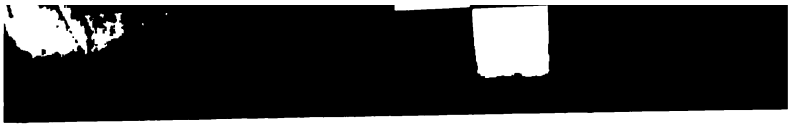

THE MIDLANDERS

"Girl, I'll do it. You can tell them so. I'll make the fight!"

THE MIDLANDERS

By

CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

AUTHOR OF

The Day of Souls, My Brother's Keeper
Etc., Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN

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TO

MY SISTER

MRS. CHARLES FREDERICK BURGESS

MADISON, WISCONSIN

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THE MIDLANDERS

THE MIDLANDERS

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN TINKLETOES

IT was the morning of the King's Parade when Aurelie was lost to the Holy Family. The Holy Family was on its way from mass at Saint Louis Cathedral, Sister Anastasia leading the sedate procession with the larger girls, and Sister Laure at the rear with the smaller ones. Aurelie was the smallest one of all. She clung tightly to Sister Laure's skirts, for in the asylum, one saw nothing like this. All Royal Street was filled with bawling Mardi Gras maskers ringing bells, tooting horns and bumping into the Holy Family as though, on such a morning, there should not be such a thing as an orphan in the whole round world. And on the corner Aurelie, very frightened, looked up into the eyes of an old man who stared down at her with crafty and deliberate intent, and then stumped after the procession on his wooden peg-leg, bound round with a shiny brass band, as if now the matter was settled, and of all the orphans, big ones, middle-sized ones and smaller ones, "light mixed," "dark mixed"—and some almost black—there was just one he wanted, and that was the littlest one of all!

Many, many years after, a black-eyed and vivacious young woman, whom all the land had read about, starting on her wedding journey, threw her arms about a silvery-headed, one-legged old rebel and kissing him, said:

"Now, Uncle Michigan, before we say good-by, tell me the *real* reason you stole me?"

The old rebel chuckled as he had done a thousand times at this same vexed question. "Well, you had on a little blue wammus and little blue pants and I done reckoned you was a *boy!* So I follered you right up close, and when a lot of them Mardy Graws come along blowing horns and bumped into the convent sisters every way, I just grabbed you up and stumped off, for I says: 'By Mighty, this is the one Captain Tinkletoes'll want—this littlest one with the little blue pants.' So off to the woods we went!"

Then she bubbled with a fond reproving laughter. "Now, don't be silly! That story is awfully silly! But, Uncle Mich, I'm glad you stole me—then is when *everything* began to happen!"

Well, let us see Aurelie off on her honeymoon, while we go back twenty years to the morning when Uncle Michigan seized her out of the demoralized Holy Family and stumped off to the French Market lugger landing in Old New Orleans, where he put her on Etienne Guillimet's crab boat bound for Barataria Bay. He gave her a praline to suck lest she cry, and turned a crab basket over her head, and not until the *Caminada* had wheezed some miles up the yellow Mississippi and turned off through a canal leading to the wild Louisiana swamps did he take the basket off.

Aurelie still sucked the praline unblinkingly. Never such a feast with the decorous Holy Family. Her first taste of the wicked world was good.

When the Cajun captain saw the child he was amazed.

"By damn, ole man—whose ees dat?"

"Oh," said Uncle Michigan, scratching a match evasively on his wooden leg. "A babby done goin' down to its wimmin folks—'way off past John-the-Fool and Africa and them camps. It's a right lonesome country!"

But if Captain Etienne and the Cajun crew had remembered they might have known that, long before the lower lakes were reached, a trapper's pirogue shot out from the overhanging jungle, and Uncle Michigan handed down the child to another old man who sat it before him in the tiny canoe and stared at it with incredulous adoration. The *Caminada* wheezed off to the south, and all about the mighty woods grew still with only the hoot of an owl in the twilight gloom under the moss-hung cypress. The little old man still stared at the child who looked back expectant, yet fearless.

"Done come!" he breathed in his exultation: "Done *come!*"

He took her in his arms and held her off, in his eyes the light of the Magi as they stood in the door of Bethlehem. And when Michigan paddled on to where a great bar of the sunset broke through the forest he saw the child in a golden light and laughed his happiness. "A little child shall lead 'em! Michigan, here I be, an old fool reb off in the swamps with the frogs

and owls and snakes and 'gators, waitin' for the child to come lead 'em to occupy the land—*and here it be!*"

But Michigan was silent. He had made an awful discovery.

They went on past the evil spikes of the cypress lifting out of the black water where once a giant gar stirred the depths; and once an alligator crossed slowly before them; and once a gray shark swam lithely in the salt tide setting up from the gulf; and once far off an owl called, and from a palmetto overhanging the canoe a copperhead snake fell by the child's side, but she seemed without fear. And in the last rosy light a snowy egret sailed above them, and on a shell ridge a four-point buck watched until the swampers' pirogue had stolen on into the black wet forest.

They came to a tiny garden at the end of a canal filled with purple hyacinth, and all about the thatched fence the green cane grew. The lean hound pups came to greet them from under the palmetto hut, and the old man lifted the child and set her there among them.

"Yere's home," he said. "And yere you'll grow up to lead 'em. Lee'll come on his big white horse, and Stonewall a-chargin' and rarin'; and ole Jeb Stuart and Colonel Maramaduke of my ole bat'ry. And up and up'll come the old gray lines jest as it's done been revealed to me, and this little child shall lead 'em to occupy the land!"

"Old Man, you been drinkin' too much o' that Cajun coffee since I left. Now yore ole head is done buzzin'. Did you feed them pups?"

"Mush and pot liqueh, every day, Michigan!"

"Done stretch them mink pelts on the ole China-tree?"

"Done stretch every pelt, Michigan!"

"Done tote out that moss from the deep swamp?"

"Done tote every pound, Michigan! Done set the traps and run the crab line and tend the lily boom, and every minute I says, 'Yere I be down in the swamps where I never surrendered and up Nawth's the Government and it ain't never surrendered, but now Michigan's comin' to bring the child that'll lead the ole gray line to occupy the land!' How'd you find him, Michigan? Did he done come right out o' a cloud o' glory?"

Michigan pushed aside the mosquito-bars under the palm thatch where a tiny fire flickered in the clay furnace. He fanned it with his hat and the child gravely watched one old man and then the other. One was tall and the other short, but each had lost a leg! The two brass bands shone valiantly. She smiled out of her dark-eyed, thin little face which had looked upon much brief change and indifference in a meager little life and was not given to whimpering.

"Wasn't no cloud o' glory," answered Michigan mournfully. "I done couldn't get hold of a child anywheres till along come a lot of orphans with them convent sisters. And I see the littlest one and just then the sisters got flustered with all the Mardy Graws blowin' horns and yellin'—"

"Done know'd it!" crowed Old Man Captain delightedly. "A cloud o' glory or some excitement!"

"Old Man Captain, I got to tell you something. I grabbed the littlest one—with the little blue pants; but we made an awful mistake!"

"Huccome mistake, Michigan?"

"She's a *girl!*"

Old Man Captain looked fearfully at Aurelie in the gloom of the falling night. "Go on, now"—he murmured—"go on, now!"

"How could I tell when she had on them little blue pants? Just like a boy, Old Man! And we got 'way down in the swamps before I found out."

Old Man Captain could hardly whisper. He peered at his partner doubtfully. "Huccome you find out, Michigan!"

Michigan was more terribly embarrassed than he had been since the surrender. His pink cheeks burned, while his partner pulled his own white beard nervously. "Huccome, Michigan?" gasped Old Man Captain.

"Oh, well," equivocated Michigan, "I see a little chain with a silver cross hangin' about her neck under her dress, so I just got to peekin' round!"

Old Man Captain was terribly shocked. He spat off in the swamp as he squatted by the fire. The serpent had entered Eden. In twenty-five years of wandering they had their first dilemma. "How's a girl goin' to lead 'em?" asked Old Man Captain mournfully.

Michigan raised his eyes with a great idea. "Who said a girl *couldn't?* Reckon nothin' was said in your revelation about it bein' a *boy?* It just said *child!*"

Old Man Captain stared. The great idea was too big for him. The mosquitoes were drifting in with their nightfall singsong, and when they bit Aurelie she whimpered, and her dark eyes sought Old Man Captain's appealingly. She put out a trustful hand to

touch his wooden leg. That was too much. He smiled. She crawled over and patted Michigan's wooden leg. The two shy old swampers laughed together.

"We done got a babby, Michigan!"

"We done have, Old Man! All along o' yore crazy notion! You wouldn't let me alone till I go to N'Awlyns and get a child to bring up."

"Wa'n't no crazy notion. It was revealed to me, I done tell you. But I reckon it didn't say it had to be a boy exactly."

"Well, Old Man, if we keep this girl we got to quit driftin' 'round the swamps. No more bush-cattin' upriver when the big water's comin', or turtlin' down the lakes, or diggin' up the shells for pirate's hide-ups. No, sir—if we keep her we got to stay right here like we was a fambly."

Old Man Captain stared again. This was a sudden turning of the long road of romance. Thirty years he and Michigan had fished and seined and trapped and drifted logs and prospected pirates' treasure from Grand Isle to Butte La Rose, and this was the first time fate had put a finger across the path. He rubbed his head. "Reckon so. Bein' it's a girl, I reckon so!"

"Got to stay right yere," pursued Michigan relentlessly, "and make a home and get a woman."

"A woman?" That was too much. Old Man Captain was dismayed.

"Yes, sir. How's two old fool Johnnies like you and me goin' to raise her to be a lady if we ain't got a woman?"

"Now you begin to raise problems when I thought everything was ca'm," quavered his partner.

"Well, how's she goin' to lead 'em if she ain't raised to be a lady?"

Old Man Captain could not answer. "I reckon," he murmured. "Only yere's you and me hung together year in and out since the surrender, and every Christmas, Michigan, I whittle out a new leg for you and you whittle out one for me, and nary a word o' wimmin. Twenty-eight legs we cut out for each other, and nary a word o' wimmen!"

"Well, yere we are," retorted Michigan helplessly, "got to have a woman. Mebbe we can get one of the Chino wimmen from the platforms, or mebbe we can get the Bia woman."

And the next morning, after the child had breakfasted on condensed milk and mush and was playing with the hound pups before the palmetto thatch, Michigan stole out of the flooded forest with the Bia woman in his pirogue. She came to stand over the child listening to the confused tales of the wooden-legged swampers who did their best to explain. And the promises they made! If she would only stay and help them rear the guest to be a lady they would roam no more. They would stay and tend the lily boom for the lumber company, and catch fish and crabs for the trade boats, and build a lean-to on the house, and buy rice and red beans and molasses and shoes—Oh, the wonderful things they would do if the Bia woman would only stay and rear the child to be a lady!

The Bia woman looked down Indian-faced and stolid, but when the guest came without fear and took her hand and smiled up, the shifty-footed basket-maker knelt and wiped the little one's face. And at

nightfall she came again with all her goods, paddling through the woods by trails that none but the hardiest trappers beyond "the forty-arpent line" could follow. Nothing she cared that Old Man Captain had retreated to the swamps in '65 and had never surrendered; nor that Michigan, who gained his name through being captured by the cavalry of that state, had followed Old Man Captain because, certainly if Old Man Captain wouldn't surrender, and the Government up North wouldn't surrender, why one must stick to Old Man Captain. She came because the child smiled at her, and she was alone. She had lost four brothers and sisters in the great storm at La Cheniere, and the years since she had been with the pirogue makers at the Lake Salvador Temple, or at an evil shrimp camp on John-the-Fool; and once she had followed a seine crew to the open gulf, pulling an oar in the glassy calms with the best of them, but coming back better neither in money nor morals.

Long years after, in her bright world the child had a memory of the Indian basket-maker, stolid, her black hair hanging straight behind her ears, in which were two brass rings, kneeling to blow the coals in the clay furnace and roasting live crabs, watching them writhe with the calm of the savage. And another memory was of the Indian woman taking her miles through the swamps in her slender pirogue to meet some priest who came on monthly visits from the lower coast plantations, and thereafter the child came to know that she had been named Aurelie because that word was found on her rosary. Then came a jumble of child remembrances so fantastic that she came to think they must

be dreams: of the long hot days and wonderful sunsets over the shoreless lakes, the mornings all aglitter under the moss-plumed cypress, the cardinals and mocking-birds flitting above the floating hyacinths around their tiny garden. Many summers Aurelie watched the eternal procession of the hyacinths past their palm hut, sometimes so choking the bayou that it was a sea of purple, but one in which no boat could move, not even the log steamer which came down now and then to tow a raft up to the great river to the North.

She grew with many generations of hound pups from the day of Ponto and Flora. They built palm thatch after palm thatch when the old ones sagged in the July rains, or the floods from crevasses drove them into the tree platform built in a live-oak for just such dangers. In summer the two old men toted moss from the black swamp and sold it to the trade boats; in winter they trapped and hunted and ran the crab lines, and all these months and years Old Man Captain lived in a great expectancy, of what, none exactly knew. Not even Michigan, who sometimes would shake his head and confide to Aurelie that "Old Man, he done gone clean crazy this time!"

Old Man would sit for hours regarding Aurelie as she played on the hard-packed earth before the thatch, his vague blue eyes lit with his vision. Then at times he would mutter, or at night would get up to pace the path between the hut and the bayou, calling out phrases of the mighty drama that had touched his brain. Sometimes it was Lee on his big white horse, or Stonewall rarin' and chargin', or at times it was of Jean La

Fitte's pirate treasure buried somewhere from Plaquemine to Grand Terre and which Aurelie was to find and so enrich the Confederacy that the old gray lines would rise triumphantly. Yes, Aurelie was to lead 'em to occupy the land.

But one summer Old Man Captain was not so well. He did not follow Michigan to the deep swamp for moss or turtles, but was content to sit and tend the lily boom at the end of the canal. While Aurelie chattered, and the Bia woman wove her crab baskets, Old Man whittled on Michigan's Christmas leg, which he kept hidden under the coil of the boom chain. Michigan knew it was there but he pretended ignorance, and everybody helped along the gay deceit. Christmas day each partner gave the other his new leg; and so long, for Aurelie's sake, had they lived in this one camp that the place was cluttered with peg-legs. They were used for all sorts of purposes, from propping up the sagged thatch to moss frame posts. Those wooden legs led to all sorts of domestic complications. Sometimes when Old Man Captain got out of bed to walk the path calling on the God o' battles, or telling of the treasure of the Old Pirate Folkses, he would strap on Uncle Michigan's peg-leg instead of his own; and then, when he crawled back to bed, chilled with the dew, and Uncle Michigan got out at dawn to make the coffee, the latter would not disturb Old Man to get his own leg. He gently strapped on his partner's and went to the swamps, but as Michigan was tall and Old Man Captain short, he was not altogether comfortable.

And this confusion of wooden legs troubled Aurelie. She tied a pink ribbon on Michigan's peg, and a blue

one on Old Man Captain's; but in the dark this did no good. Old Man Captain's head was too full of the splendors of the recoming of the gray lines to tell pink from blue. Then once the towboat niggers, Hogjaw and Doc Fortune and Crump, gave her a little brass bell. Aurelie tied it to Old Man Captain's wooden leg, and after that everything was fine. Michigan merely had to crawl around in the dark hut and rattle legs until the bell tinkled. Then he took the other one.

But many a night, when the moon drew up above the cypress wall, Aurelie, drowsily stirring under the palm thatch, heard the bell and knew that Old Man Captain was out stumping the path and chanting of the South's lost legions.

And all about camp and over the bayou when there was moss to bale or crabs to catch, one heard it tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! So that the towboat niggers gave him the name that stuck thereafter: "Captain Tinkletoes."

Old Man Captain did not mind; he smiled vaguely. These days he was not so sure about many things. When he started the old heroic tale of how the child should lead 'em, a number of extraneous matters got mixed with it—pirate treasure and alligator hunting and the weather, so that Aurelie, at times, couldn't make out just what was expected of her, only it was very big and important.

One day when they had gone on a deer hunt into the swamps far to the east among nameless waterways through a dying forest, she stood up in the pirogue and pointed at a trail of smoke miles away over a bit of shimmering marsh.

"Uncle Michigan, what's that 'way off yander?"

"That's a big boat come 'way over the ocean a-goin' to the city!"

"Where I come from?"

"I done reckon so. And up beyond N'Awlyns the river goes and goes—states and lands and countries, all with music names, Aurelie, for I done spell some of 'em out on the map."

She regarded him seriously, and then the distant glimpse of the great ship. "Ain't I ever goin' to learn all them music names, Uncle Michigan? And ain't I ever goin' see all them lands and states and countries?"

Uncle Michigan looked at Captain Tinkletoes, small and frail and gray, humped against the flambeau box—and he took Aurelie's hand and whispered: "You sure *air!* One o' these days when Old Man Captain surrenders."

And after that, in another year of the colorful slow-moving life of the bayou—the lugger men and trapper men and drifters and moss-pickers, going continually up the river to the North, while she watched merely the drift of the lilies with the tides—Aurelie came to wonder what the world was. She asked Captain Tinkletoes when he was going to surrender, and he smiled out of his odd blue eyes and said: "When you grow up to occupy the land!"

Always that. She asked Uncle Michigan to explain, and he took her in his arms and mumbled. "You're leadin' 'em, Aurelie. Leadin' two ole fool soldiers to the promised land o' happiness—right yere!"

So from the first she knew love, an amazing and protecting love. And when her growing curiosity asked

again, Michigan took down the old red-backed map which was one of his treasures.

"Yere she be, Aurelie, flowin' from all the land. From all the states and mountains the little brooks run into the big ones, and the big ones run on from the Ozarks and Rockies and Alleghenies—Platte and Tennessee and Ohio and Missoury—down they come through the big river to us by the sea!"

"Michigan, I'd like to see all them places."

"Yes, sir! When Captain Tinkletoes, he surrenders!"

She puzzled more over that as she sat by the lily boom and watched the baby sharks play underneath the flowers and the giant gars steal in and out. She twisted the purple spikes of hyacinths into her hair and stared down at her brown little face. Then she clapped her hands and pointed off to the north. "I belong off there! Where all the states and mountains come from! Done goin' up to occupy the land!"

And one day Captain Tinkletoes surrendered. Not dramatically, leading the old gray lines and shouting, but just piteously and without purpose, as great dreams end in life. Hogjaw and Doc Fortune found him when they were tie-cutting in the swamp. His pirogue was upturned, and Captain Tinkletoes was under it in the black water. Aurelie remembered when they brought him into camp—how the bayou men smoked and talked and drank their coffee. Etienne, the crab-boat man, wanted to go fetch a priest from English Turn, but Michigan reckoned not. They would take him up to Spanish Man's Point, where often the two had dug for treasure around the pirate's grave. And there they

laid him and the great dream, a little blanketed heap, down in the white shells over which the gay little lizards scampered, while the mocking-birds sang in the green cane at his head. Aurelie, holding the Indian woman's hand, heard her little bell tinkle when the black men shoveled in the shells.

Michigan took off his battered hat and looked about.

"Done surrendered! And yere's me that follered him for forty year; and yere's the Bia woman that did the cookin'. And yere's the little girl he loved and that made two old fool swampers quit their wanderin' and settle down. Done surrendered to God and laid his ole gray head to rest!"

Then they went back to camp in silence, and there Michigan gave Captain Tinkletoes' sawed-off shotgun to Doc Fortune, and his razor that had cut nothing since the war, to Crump; and a little old piece of colored glass that he had kept wrapped in a boot-top since '72, to Hogjaw; but the five wooden legs of Captain Tinkletoes he kept for himself. Just keepsakes.

The next day Michigan beckoned Aurelie out to the bayou side where he and the Bia woman had had a brief talk. He lifted the child and pointed her hand off to the north. "Now we're done goin' to occupy the land!"

"What land is that, Michigan?"

"The land o' joy!" he cried, shining-eyed. "That's where you'll lead us to!" He motioned to the Indian woman. "We'll take this yere little girl and drift 'way off yander to all the places she ain't ever seen. First we'll pole the ole john-boat down to Grand Isle so she'll see the ocean. Then we'll drift off Atchafalaya

way and she'll see the big woods. Then we'll drift on north and west and every way, and she'll see all the states and countries! What names is them I done told you, Aurelie—the music names?"

"Californy," she said simply.

"And next one?"

"Arizony."

"And Montany, and Ioway and Tennessee and Ohio! All them we'll see and more! Lead us to the land o' joy!"

And all her strange after-life of laughter and of tears the little girl remembered the old soldier waving his hand to the undiscovered countries. And always she knew he was at heart the poet, the adventurer, the lover, whatever else he might be; nothing could change that.

So the next day they piled old traps and boxes and blankets and hound pups and the five wooden legs of Captain Tinkletoes as keepsakes, into the john-boat and set off to find the land of joy with music names. South and east through brilliant wildernesses, poling through lily jams, sailing swamp lakes, paddling salt marshes. Shrimp camps, oyster platforms, terrapin hunters of Grand Isle—they wandered and worked, and Aurelie came to know other children of all hues and races, and at the island balls learned to dance with orange blossoms in her hair. The murmur of the sea was in her ears, the moonlight on the oaks in her eyes, and with the droning Creole violins she awakened to gaiety, losing the droll seriousness of a savage. Also, for the first time she had her face washed cleanly—by the storekeeper's wife who knew then she was not of the

undecipherable Chino-Spanish-Filipino breed of the shrimp platform villages. But when the balls were over, a shifty-footed and suspicious savage woman took Aurelie and led her off to their ragged tent. Always, through the blur of queer faces—black, brown, yellow, white—Aurelie remembered the watchful love in the eyes of the basket-maker and of Uncle Michigan. Always, for these were what she knew of love!

From the Gulf-coast islands they went west and north, and in the years the child became a girl, slender, lithe, swift—keen of eye on a deer trail, trapping the mink and raccoons, following the wild bees' flight, weaving baskets with strong brown fingers to lure the shrimp from under the lilies, balancing herself to shoot in a ticklish "running pirogue" that would steal through the swamps where a heavier hunter dared not follow. Thus she grew, with never a qualm for the blood of the hunted nor a doubt of the Maker's intent. But at twelve she was a woman, blithe and unthinking and kind-hearted, without fear, without guile.

Perhaps!

At any rate, one day, censured by the Indian woman, she stole from camp, swam Grand River with her gaudy little gown tucked in a knot on her head, dressed in the woods and appeared at a Cajun ball—with a wild hyacinth in her hair. She danced and laughed and bewildered the woodsmen, pretending to know no English when the Yankees addressed her, and no French when spoken to in that tongue. But standing in the heated "ballroom", she sang a barbaric song the Indian

woman had taught her, posed with an odd theatric fancy, and then ran away leaving them gaping.

When she swam to the john-boat at dawn and put her hand upon Michigan's as he fished, he started, tried to swear helplessly and stopped.

"But ain't I growed up now?" she laughed.

"Damme! How we goin' to do if you act that-a-way?"

"Which-a-way?" And she drew up her naked little body, poised on the boat, pressed her hands over her swelling breasts and stared to the north. "Michigan, when air we goin' to see all the states and lands with the music names you tell of?"

"Aurelie, you air gettin' to be such a big girl and such a pretty girl as I dunno if we ought to let you see all them countries."

"Then I'll run off and see 'em myself!"

But at last they came out on the mighty river that Michigan had not seen since he left his leg at Vicksburg; and another year found them at Memphis among the shanty-boat folk. Then a government dredge towed them up river, the Bia woman cooking for the crew. The men used to watch a child who, from her house-boat deck, would put a bit of tinsel or a flower in her hair and stare down in the water to admire the picture, or would smooth her gipsy dress over her hips, unnoticing her audience. If they hailed her she pretended not to hear them. They would not believe she was but thirteen, so tropically primal was her womanhood, so tantalizingly wise her reserve.

So, up the great river of her dreams they went for

months and months. Then, one night on the Minnesota shore, the dredge burned, and Uncle Michigan cut the house-boat loose. It bumped on down the river again to come aimlessly adrift in a pocket of the Iowa hills. There it stuck, and all the dreamy summer the weeds and sands thickened about until it could drift no more.

And one day the exiles climbed a near-by hill to look down on a town buried in September maples; a decent church spire here and there, the clock tower of the court-house in the Square, and farmer folk driving homeward.

On this prosy common day of the Northern Midlands, Aurelie, with the good-humored curiosity of a savage, looked down for her first glimpse of an ordered life. Out of the sweet and heavy richness of the corn bloom and the sugar trees, from a white house, half-hidden, came a piano's notes, the first she had ever heard.

She clapped her little brown hands. "Done come! Michigan, I reckon we found some of them states and countries with the music names. We-all come to the land o' joy!"

CHAPTER II

WHEN I WAS A KID

IN September, looking from the court-house Square of Rome, one sees the ripening corn like a bronze shield on the hills which close every street end beyond the arching sugar trees. The bottoms, too, are choked by the lust of the corn, and the church spires and the ragged sycamores along the roadsides rise out of this opulent sea from the river to the bluffs as if drowning in the perfume of the tassels. These west bluffs alone seem to evade the conquest; one sees a road winding up a red gap among groves of oak, hickory, walnut; with the crimson sumac and alders showing a lighter soil, the upland croppings of shale, clay and stony ridges. Here one has glimpses of clover and oat stubble, rounded stacks, barns, windmills, white farm homes and wire fences about shaded pastures. But beyond, the triumphant sea of the corn stretches north and west across the Iowa Midlands, for there is no trace of the virgin soil, the short grass as the Indians rode it when the settlers of the forties came.

It is a land fat to bursting with numberless rich and complacent little cities. The county annals show you that the people never have hungered, fought nor suffered. From the first every man had his bag of silver

under the puncheon floor of his cabin and went forth to buy the acres as the Sacs and Foxes moved away. The second year they ate their own corn with the venison and prairie chicken; their schools and churches were built before the oak in their own cabin homes was dry; and the first grand jury of this Iowa county sat in the untrodden grass of what is now Rome's main street and indicted a territorial commissioner for malfeasance. It was significant; the first Midlanders were insurgents of conscience and not hunger-rebellious, for never had they felt want or known sacrifice.

The Indians called it "The Land of Beautiful Rivers," and few towns there are which have not a stream loitering near over clear pebbly bars and along blue-stem margins where the wild grapes and crab-apples lure the children autumn long. Through Rome, therefore, flows Sinsinawa Creek sleeping the summer in leaf-lined, sweet-smelling pools along the shady streets where the boys fish for shiners with their hats; and where, in October, the water having dried, the oak and maple leaves drift deep so that, by Hallowe'en all the town is filled with the pungent smell of the smoke.

Rome is in a continual grandmotherly quarrel with Sinsinawa Creek; never has it been able to reason sobriety into the laughing jade which tumbles its June freshets down from the bluffs, fills every hollow of the wandering streets and vacant lots, plays mischief with fences and walks and goes its way to the Mississippi across the bottoms, leaving its mirrored pools to taunt the ancient dame of a town with its wilfulness. Yet Rome so loves the wanton that when Earlville

wanted to divert its waters in the uplands to run a factory for that aggressive metropolis of the county, the protest that went up echoed for years in local politics. Earlvillians called it "Sin Creek," or "Skunk Creek," but what could one expect of Earlville?

In Rome when a tree interferes with a sidewalk the walk is not built; in Earlville the tree is cut down and the cement laid. That is why Earlville has the railroad, the furniture factory and the Elks' Club, while Rome has only its memories, its rusty fences and its best families. And the county court-house. The court-house offices and the best families were a tradition as venerably intertwined as the ivy and bricks of the walls. Rome knew its position. It would have sat with dignity on its hills only Skunk Creek—I beg pardon, Sinsinawa! kept pushing it off.

Yet none in Rome more than mildly censured Sinsinawa. Not even Wiley T. Curran of the Rome *News,* who was always bothering the town board about street improvements. He ought to have known better. Every one having county business had to come to Rome. If one didn't like the streets one could go to —Earlville.

Wiley T. Curran used to retort that a good many had. Rome contained not nearly so many people as it did when the war closed. Earlville, then, was merely one of Thaddeus Tanner's cow pastures. Earlville welcomed any one who would "hustle" as the Boosters' Club put it. Rome did not care to have people about whose families nothing was known. Every one there had lived in Rome since 1860 at least. Even the obnoxious Mr. Curran's progenitors; and some of the

old families tolerated the *News* solely because Pat Curran founded it before the court-house was built. But those families were few, for Pat Curran had been one of the fighting abolitionists, and southern Iowa was noticeably in the stream of the Kentucky and Virginia migrations during the secession prelude. To this day these lower counties are known as "The Reserve," and have ever stood aloof from the rampant republicanism of the militant North and West. In Rome still exist dim traditions of Tully's Raid and the copperheadism that was smothered in the triumph of the northern arms. It lends a political conservatism and a "best family" air to society, and accounts for the tumble-down fences, unpaved streets and Arcadian corner lots. It also furnished Curran, of the *News*, with editorials.

But no one who was any one minded Curran. In Rome everybody who was anybody had money. In these rich and mature days, having the static order of the East and a stationary population, more than a generation of young men had gone off from the priceless corn lands of the county to the cheaper acres of the Canadas, or the irrigated valleys of California and New Mexico or to the cities. Retired farmers moving into town for the schools and freedom from stock-feeding, did not compensate for the drain of younger blood. Curran lamented this. But Curran himself had gone off to swing the circle of the West for a decade and come back a beggar to take up the *News* on his father's death. And now the *News* could cackle as it pleased about progressiveness and keeping the young men in the county for their fresh spirit and lustier ideals. No

one minded—none of the best people. Anybody who was anybody wouldn't think of moving away.

Except Mr. Curran. He wondered why he had come back. Sentiment brought him as it had sent him forth, as it directed most of his affairs. Sentiment, this September afternoon, kept him sitting on a bale of stock paper in front of the *News* office watching the town kids bat flies on the vacant lot next to him. It was press day, the week's issue was run off and Aleck and Jim Mims, the tramp printer, were wrapping the mail list to take to the post-office in the wheelbarrow. Mr. Curran ought to have been busy, but he smoked and watched the town kids. In that same lot he batted flies with the same fence for a back-stop, yelled the same derision at the pitcher, broke the same windows and fled down the same alley when old Marshal Bee came doddering from the court-house on complaint of the Widow Steger. Mr. Curran could sentimentally forget that he was thirty-nine.

A clamor of the high-school football practise came from behind the curtain of yellowing sugar trees on High Street. Only the younger town kids still lingered at the summer diversion of fly-batting, and for every urchin who hung his bare legs over the *News* walk in the tarweed, waiting his turn, there were at least two dogs. As Jim Mims said, all the yelps and kyoodles in town were there. Mr. Curran sentimentally wished he had a dog—he felt himself a man worthy a good dog. He listened to Aleck slapping the paste on the wrappers and watched the kyoodles yawing around the kids' feet, scratching their spines in the tarweed

and grinning up with all the pleasure of it, and he said suddenly aloud:

"Gee, I wish I had a dog!"

Then somebody whom he had not noticed—a big dusty man wearing a new and absurdly small derby hat—stopped with his hand on the hitching-post before the *News* and retorted:

"Gee, I wish *I* had a dog!"

The editor turned and then stood up and yelled. And the big dusty man took his hand and he yelled.

"Wiley, old top!"

"Rube, you old Indian!"

Rube grinned all over his swarthy face. "Old top, how are you?"

"High, wide and handsome!"

"You don't look that last, Wiley. How's the old lady?"

"Aunt Abby's fit as silk. Come up to dinner."

"I intended to. Hey, the kids still playing ball on the lot like they did when I was a kid!"

"Season closed, Rube? Where did your bunch wind up?"

"In the cellar. I'm through with the game, Wiley. I can't throw to second no more. My arm's all in. No more of this bush-league ball for me. Carmichael's still got that job for me—chambermaid to his livery horses?"

Mr. Curran laughed sorrowfully. So did Rube Van Hart. He rubbed his big red hands and then a telltale red nose and looked down at the town kids who had assembled to gaze in awe. One raced off to the high-

school practise to spread the news: "Hi, Rube Van Hart's got back!"

Everybody knew Rube. Poor old Rube! The whole nation knew Rube a while back—let's see? Was it with the Cubs, 1901 or '02? Eh, the bubble reputation! There were other mighty men now. Rube had gone back to the "bush".

"Next spring," went on the former leaguer, "I'll stay and coach the high-school bunch, Wiley."

"No you won't," smiled the editor. "When you begin to read the Sunday sups, and spring training opens up down in San Antonio you'll be missing some fine morning. Gone to help break in the Cub recruits, and then you'll play out the season with the Cotton League or the Three-C."

"No more. Here's my finish, Wiley—right here where I learned the game next the *News* lot. Back in the old town where you come back, too, Wiley. Back where we was kids together."

The editor looked wistfully across the court-house Square. The big leaguer's glance followed. A bar of the sunset lighted the dingy old court-house. The windows were open. From the court room above came the voice of some lawyer droning his plea to a farmer jury. In an office on the lower floor one could see a woman bent seriously over a desk littered with papers and reports.

"The old red, west side school," murmured Rube. "And there's Janet Vance, and now she's county superintendent, and I'm all in, and you're a fool editor. That girl got ahead of us all, Wiley, since we was kids together."

Wiley sighed. He pulled his short brown beard, that Vandyke which, in Rome, lent him a foreign air and gave him the reputation of being literary, whatever that meant. Nobody, not even the fool editor, knew exactly. Yet nobody was afraid of Mr. Curran. The kids spoke of him as "Wiley"; all the old women came in to tell him their neighborhood troubles; and on High Street the best families ignored him, even with their irritated feeling that on points of the worldly manner he was infinitely better versed than they, and that he was laughing at them. It was known that Mr. Curran had been to Europe. It was rumored that he had been in jail. One can learn a deal in each. Mr. Curran, it seems, had learned to laugh.

"Every time I come back to the old town," mused Rube, "I wonder why you didn't marry Janet. Everybody thought you would." He added apologetically: "*She* thought you would."

Wiley shrugged. Old friends can say much and hurt little.

"Why the blazes," resumed Rube, "don't you marry her yet? You and your old shop! Then you'd make a living. If she'd married *me*, I'd been batting .400. Now see I'm a busher and going down."

Wiley sat listening. "I suppose," he murmured, like a man who relishes his anticipation but draws back from its ends. He had swung the circle of the West like most of the Midland young men. Homesteading in Dakota, mining, timber cruising, selling real estate, running country papers, leading forlorn hopes of impossible reforms in the wide-open camps of Nevada and Montana, fruit raising on the Matagorda coast of

Texas, exploiting reclamation projects in Louisiana—always the enthusiast, the dreamer, gaining, for himself nothing at all except the ardor of the game—the mighty and expiring drama of the old West in the nineties he had seen and lived and exulted in; free-footed and shiftless for sixteen years he had missed nothing of the last of the great days. He had written once of the final round-up in the southwestern cattle country and its epic note had aroused the magazine makers for its brilliance and its pathos. A dying flame with the life it celebrated. He had done nothing more; he was back in the old town, and merely Curran of the *News*.

He looked from Janet Vance's office window to his shop, a long one-story building, unpainted, gray, like a worm that had crawled hungrily down from the bluff to High Street, to stare at the court-house from its two grimy windows. You would never have thought that out of this lethargic monster came more contraband opinions, and into it more unpaid bills than any print-shop in Iowa.

Over the lawn from the basement jail came a man who smelled of carbolic acid. The town kids knew he was a "trusty" and that some of the prisoners came every day to get the exchanges from the *News* office. The fumigated one spoke pleasantly to the editor and went in for the papers. He rummaged the editor's desk, opened a drawer and filled his pipe from the editor's tobacco, and came out. In the drawer were two dollars of the editor's money but the jailbird did not touch them—that wouldn't have been playing square with "Wiley".

Rube watched him go back to the court-house jail. Around the Square lights were coming now and then; from Dickinson's grocery, the Hub Clothing House with its Isenbaum & Kickenheimer clothes from New York; the Palace of Sweets, with a departing group of high-school girls, and a countryman gazing in the window mill-pond at the gold fish; the First National Bank with the gilt legend, "Van Hart & Donley," above the cornice, and before it the historic hitching-post with the lead bullet implanted in the copperhead riot of '63—prosy and commonplace it might be, but how dear and familiar was it all!

Even Wiley T. Curran, the town's insurgent, knew it, now that he was back, a bit gray about the temples after years on the great highway beyond the everlasting hills.

Rube voiced the curious call of home-coming: "It's funny how sometimes we all want to get back. There was the two Schnitzler boys and Morrison—ain't he in the bank, now? And you and me—once Hen McFetridge batted a fly clean up in the court-house clock and stopped it for six months—remember? And the night we was stealing Tanner's grapes, and you fell through the arbor on the old woman, and they pinched you—remember? What's Thad Tanner doing now?"

"Still running the county board—soaking us on bridge contracts."

"Same little old boss, eh? And Boydston and Curry —still on the board and putting Tanner's work through?"

"Sure."

"And Old Mowry, the undertaker, still living across from the Widow Steger's and watching for the old lady to die, eh?"

"Yes—still buying his groceries of Dickinson, the old lady's nephew, though he hates him worse'n poison, because he figures on getting the case when she passes. Yes, sir—seven years now Mowry has traded at Dickinson's waiting for the widow to pass, and every week they expect her to go, and she hangs on."

Rube looked across at the widow's garden, its cannas and fire-bush brilliant in the dusk. "Suffering Johnson, don't anybody ever die here, Wiley?"

"No. If they did the *News* would have a linotype, Rube, and be a daily; and the old town would have street lights and sidewalks. Look at Earlville with its factories springing up, and the way they're opening up the soft coal streaks on the upper creek! Why we could have had all that if people here had allowed the railroad to come in! They chased away a fifty-thousand-dollar canning plant last spring because they didn't want a factory class in Rome. I came pretty near suspending publication when I heard that."

"What Rome needs is a few first-class funerals, Wiley."

"You bet!" prayed the editor fervently.

"Wiley," murmured Rube, "you get out the rottenest paper in Iowa, and the old town it has no manner of use for you, but I like you. You ain't batting anywhere near .300, but you can carry bats. I'm coming up to supper to-night."

"Sure thing, Rube!" The editor glanced to the back of his lot where the cottage light was glowing. His

old housekeeper was always prepared for guests, for to Mr. Curran's table came every unknown itinerant of the road, shy farmers from the backwoods bottoms of the north side of the county, blacklisted railroad men from the Chicago strikes, any one, in fact, who had no welcome elsewhere.

The editor languidly snapped his watch. The pressmen had long finished with the paper; and although the pettifogger's pleading still came from the court room, the warm September dusk had fallen. Somewhere up the bluff a cow was bawling, and from the high-school campus came the caroling of boys' voices.

"Court's late with that case," murmured Rube, "and ain't that the judge's son come to drive him home now?"

A young man was getting out of a rather smart rig at the court-house hitching-rail. He helped after him a girl in white, and though the evening hid their faces, the frank and easy banter of their parting made plain their camaraderie. The girl tripped on to a store, and the young man sauntered toward the *News* office. Half-way across his careless hail came to Wiley Curran. Then his eye went to Rube. He leaped the tarweed gutter and grasped his uncle's hand.

"Why, Rube," he cried in his rare friendliness. "Put her there! Wiley and I saw in the *Tribune* about that triple you and Kelly and Schmitz put over in that last game with Peoria—some class, Rube!"

Rube grinned appreciation. "Flare-up, Harlan. My arm's all in." He held this good-humored, lithely-built nephew off and looked him over. His blond hair curled in a likable way for women and his smile had

openness and serenity. Yet in his heartiness there was reserve. His clothes helped that indefinable impression of class and poise which was inherited; but above all significant distinctions there stood forth his blithe and common-sense democracy, that uneradicable quality of the best American.

"Harvard," went on Rube, "don't seem to have much on you."

Harlan laughed. He pounded Rube's dusty shoulder. "Come on up to dinner, Rube. Father and I want a line on the world's series!"

Rube hesitated. "I'm a-going with Wiley, son. Somehow, I couldn't talk baseball up at your house. The judge is all right, but somehow a man can't hang out at a livery-stable and feel at home with your mother. She always looks as if I smelled!"

Harlan smiled slowly. "Oh, come on!" But he was thinking. Everybody knew Rube would work all winter at Carmichael's stable and get drunk on bootleg whisky with printers and farm-hands, and his mother —well, Rube finished the thought. "You see, Harlan, your mother's a mighty fine woman, but there's never much between us. Up at your table my hands and feet seem so blamed big—and once, Harlan, I busted right into a wimmen's club when I went there!"

Wiley and Harlan shouted. Rube, the black sheep, at Mrs. Van Hart's club meeting—they could imagine that!

Rube went on grinning: "When you and Elise Dickinson get married and have a home, I'll come up and tell you how we put 'em over the plate."

Harlan's reserve came back. "Rube, I'm not en-

gaged to Elise. Every time I go back to school somebody starts that yarn."

Wiley watched him keenly. He could see the rich grocer's daughter down High Street apparently waiting at the drug-store corner. Elise was going East to school this year—Bryn Mawr or Wellesley—Wiley recalled. He thought it was Mrs. Van Hart who prompted this rather than have Miss Dickinson "finish" at the Baptist Seminary in Rome. Mrs. Van Hart's word was of weight on High Street—and the grocer had more money than any one except Thaddeus Tanner.

But something in Harlan's straight-out declaration decided Wiley that the mother's grooming of a prospective daughter-in-law would be in vain. Elise was an extraordinarily "nice" girl. There was no doubt of that. But what attracted Curran the most was some potential rebellion in Harlan. Judge Van Hart's wife was not only the arbiter of High Street, but it was said, with show of truth, that she ruled her family with something of the authority of a grand dame of the old school. Mr. Curran and the *News* were her pet aversions—as Mr. Curran mischievously knew, but nothing had ever withheld the affectionate friendship of Harlan and himself.

"Well, I didn't know," muttered Rube apologetically. "All the kids grow up and get married. Except Wiley and me—but then we never growed up!" And he and Wiley laughed wistfully together. "Well, I'm going down to the station and lug up my stuff," went on Rube. "Tell Aunt Abby to have hot biscuit, Wiley . . . and honey!"

The town kids straggled after Rube. "Nobody," sighed Mr. Curran, "wants to be an editor."

Nobody did. At least nobody in Rome. All the kids would rather grow up to be noble and handsome and great and able to bat .400 like Rube Van Hart. They would rather sneak into Carmichael's stable and help bed the horses than go fishing.

Only two of all the barelegged crew remained. The yelps and kyoodles had wandered home or after Rube and his idolators—all except the Widow Steger's dog, a long, strange, German sort of dog with no legs to speak of, a lonesome boyless kyoodle that had to go home early and sleep under the geranium box.

Harlan looked with friendly interest at the two urchins remaining. They were a fair open breed of the North, tow-headed, sunned by wholesome summer. The editor smiled out at them from his desk which he was locking. The Danish boys held his fancy; he was given to sentimentalizing over the race fusion of the West, and fine editorializing of that sort when he ought to have been down meeting trains for the personals, or noting the fall millinery openings around the Square.

"Well, Knute," he began, and the elder of the two found some awkward fearlessness to address him:

"We just thought you might know first," Knute said. "Just as *soon* as the jury gets in."

Curran glanced across at the court-house again. "Oh, yes. Your dad's case is on, isn't it? Hope he licks 'em, Knute!"

The boy flushed gratefully. "Mr. Mason said we'd win sure!" His young note of faith arose. "He said what's law and justice for if Old Thad don't have to

dig up for having his crusher fixed so's paw'd get his arm cut off. Mason, he said what's law and justice for if a poor man can't win against a rich man."

The judge's son listened with a smile. Next to Wiley Curran, Lafe Mason, the lawyer, was the demagogic scalawag of Rome. Wiley reached a hand to pat Knute's head. "Little man! I hope you win—you ought to."

Knute's courage grew. "Well, here's Harlan, his dad's judge. And the whole county says Judge Van Hart's the finest man there is. He wouldn't let Old Thad Tanner get the best of dad in a suit, would he?"

A curious consciousness came to Harlan's face. He caught Wiley's pitying smile. "Lindstrom's suing Tanner for the loss of his arm at the quarry," the editor said. "Tanner offered two hundred as a settlement, but Mason persuaded John to sue. And I'm afraid"—he checked his voice—"well, contributory negligence and all that. Lord, lord—two hundred for a man's right arm—a *workingman's* arm!"

He looked on Knute's sturdy face. Peter, by his side, peered fearfully at Harlan. To the dusty lads from the Pocket quarry, Harlan was a young man of consequence who had his clothes pressed at the Iowa Pressing Club, and bought front seats in the tin opera-house when a show came to town. The town kids in the "nigger heaven" could look down and see Harlan with some pretty girl. Also he went to the frat dances and treated damsels at the Palace of Sweets, and was a "Geek", whatever that was, and studied law back East, and was a notable person in Rome, Iowa. So surely, to be the son of Judge Van Hart and live on

High Street and own one of the four automobiles in the county—all this went with law and order and righteousness, and one was deserving, without envy, of having one's pants pressed at the Iowa Pressing Club. If Knute could have apotheosized all that was best in America, next to Rube Van Hart, who could bat .400, he would have placed Harlan, the genial, kindly young man of High Street and Harvard.

"Old Thad's a hard one," Knute added, but his voice rose to a triumphant faith. "But law and justice'll beat him! Maybe we'll get a thousand dollars! Aurelie said so. And if we get a thousand dollars, Aurelie's going to have a dress and go to the high-school party! Uncle Mich said so! And Uncle Mich won't peddle no more bootleg whisky if we get a thousand dollars! Then he and paw'll get along better when he don't peddle bootleg whisky. And—" his voice fell solemnly, "if we get the thousand dollars maybe Aurelie'd *go to church!*"

The editor laughed gracelessly. He could not see Harlan's face as the lads raced across the lawn to the court-house.

"When?" he said irrelevantly, "are you coming back to practise law and expedite the régime of justice, truth, benignity and the other virtues, Harlan?"

"Next year. Father wants me to begin with the old firm. Donley is a good deal of a hack. So there's a chance for me."

"Chance?" Curran sighed. "When, for a Van Hart, was there ever anything but a chance—the golden chance? I suppose everything *will* be cut out easy for you. You're a son of fortune, Harlan." He looked

about his dingy shop, where his father's dreams and his own had ended. "Well, son, you deserve it. All that's best in our best blood is in you. I'm glad you're going to settle down here. You can do so much—much that I couldn't reach. Your position—just see how these little Dane boys look at you—little Americans in the making, and you stand for all America to them—justice, law, order." He checked his rhapsodizing at Harlan's smile. "Old chap, I mean it!"

Between the two was a comradeship which their years belied. Many a night of the long quiet summer Harlan had lounged in Wiley's shop, and while the old job-press clanked, they argued sophomorically of the day's questions. The West was astir with newer delineations of democracy, and Curran, the inutile Celtic poet and enthusiast, felt the pulsing. Socialism, the initiative and recall, direct election of senators, the checking of judicial tyranny; these, along with the little common issues of the county—municipal ownership of the water-works, road-building, drains to carry off Sinsinawa's overflow, inquiries into the Tanner Company's county contracts—all these Wiley had put before Harlan in his years of mental growth through high school.

He knew of the judge's conservatism, of all the influence of birth, breeding, association which were about the younger man, and he felt a master's pride, a jealous triumph, that he was forming Harlan's deeper ideals. The Van Harts had a tradition formed by Harvard, the *Atlantic Monthly*, a New England ancestry and generations of thrifty but not burdensome wealth. A tempered blood, a certain coldness in looking on the

larger aspect of affairs, all this went with the judge's calm, kindly, imperturbable example. The West had not broken the sense of their culture. They were the cautious genial Americans of the constitution whom one means by "the best people."

Except Rube. He was extra-constitutional and a reversion. Even Harlan could sympathetically understand why Rube's hands felt too big at his mother's dinner-table.

They walked out through the warm scented night. Wiley sighed. "Old boy, I suppose this is about the last. You'll be gone now for a year. And Arne Vance is going back to Wisconsin to finish up his agricultural course; and Janet'll be too busy with school affairs to find time for our meets in the old shop. When we talked most of the night—us four. You've meant so much to me. Janet says we ought to get out the July number of *The Inland Empire* for Christmas."

Then they both shouted irrepressibly. *The Inland Empire* was a puling monthly the quartet had started a year ago with some vast hope of harboring therein the genius of the Midlands. It was always in the Earlville print-shops, waiting for the editors to pay the printers' bills, four months behind its date-line of issue. Janet Vance's salary usually went to helping on the hamstrung magazine. Wiley Curran never had any money, and the Van Harts did not take kindly to Harlan's connection with the project.

And as the two stood chuckling on the corner, from the court-house windows there came the bellow of a man's voice. It jarred and reverberated far down High Street with its sleepy homes tucked in the dusk, a red

lamp here and there, fanned by the air of the odorous country. Then came a silence. It was as if the entire town, the sober decent community, stopped, shocked by some blasphemy. But what the two men on the corner heard now was the voice of Harlan's father, quiet, sure, insistent with authority against the hoarse passion of the other: "The court can not—" they could only catch a word here and there—"intolerable . . . the law . . . Mr. Bailiff . . . John Lindstrom. Contempt—"

Then a lower bull-like answer dying away; and the shuffle of feet.

Harlan ran across the lawn with Wiley following. As they entered the basement by the jail door a little procession came down: a big rough man, and by his side, Marryat, the sheriff. The prisoner looked ahead, his blue eyes dulled, the week's growth of beard on his face twisted into ugly lines. His right sleeve swung empty from the elbow. Behind him was Lafe Mason, his attorney, perplexed, whispering to Jewett, the pot-bellied district attorney who listened apathetically.

The big man went down. At the jail door he stopped and raised his huge fist to shake it up the stairs. Harlan saw there his father who had just come out of his chambers and was watching Lindstrom, his face a study in control, in breeding, against the other's primal anger.

"Damn the law!"

Lindstrom strode on. "Damn the court!" He turned with Marryat's hand on his shoulder. The jurors, loitering, whispering, putting on their coats, were silent. The judge looked steadfast at the prisoner as if in

himself was the spiritual inviolability of the law which could listen and endure; which had pronounced and could be patient. Harlan was at his side, and now his firm lips moved. "Lindstrom lost his case. He had none—I directed against him. The law is clear"—he stopped, and for an instant Harlan had a glimpse of the outrage and horror in his father's soul—"he cursed the law. I sent him down for contempt." The judge shivered though the air was warm. "Come on—let us get the fruit for your mother."

The young man did not follow at once. He, too, seemed dazed, but more at his father's suffering than at Lindstrom's crime. And as he watched the jailer search Lindstrom, taking from his pockets a knife, a bit of string, a nickel and a piece of tobacco, all piteous and inutile, this pocket of a poor man—Harlan saw a group on the court-house lawn outside. Two bare-legged and terrified boys and a girl who seemed mothering them against this great fear. Lindstrom saw them also. His one fist shot up over the heads of the jailers. "Ay, home with you, lads! Knute and Peter! There'll be no more school, now. Damn their law, their taxes and their schools! I'll have no more of it for me or mine!"

The girl under the arc-light looked back silently. "And you, too, Aurelie!" the big man roared. "I've fed you in my house, but there'll be no more school for you!"

Wiley Curran had started forward with a cry. The judge's son was mute. But it seemed that there was graven on his soul more than the picture there. As if on the velvet lawn, against the peace and order of the

town, the rich fat land attentive, a life had been taken in shame; or more than a life, for on the souls of the workingman's children there was wrought a hate for all time. He was conscious now that Curran was angrily shouting wild words; that the two lads had fled, and that the slender girl, with a last look as if her bitterness were too large to hurl at them, was following.

The young man felt an intolerable revulsion. He suddenly ran to the corner, staring after her and then dashed on along a street leading to the bluff. When he reached it he saw the girl on the trail among the rocks, running with the lithe swiftness of a doe. He shouted after her:

"Aurelie! *Aurelie!*"

But no answer came down from the leafy cliff. And after a moment some guilty consciousness stilled his tongue. His class, his kind, his tradition, the blood behind him fought down his man's rebellion. He went back to the Square where his father was waiting in the buggy. The men of the town had scattered from the place of justice.

CHAPTER III

THE DISCARD

THEY gave Lindstrom, the quarryman, his freedom at the end of the day. All that time he sat staring down the whitewashed corridor at the grimy window beyond which the reddening maples hung. The other prisoners swabbed the cement floor or played with greasy cards, but the one-armed man did not notice them. Marryat, the sheriff, had a real sympathy for him as he sat in the stink of the jail.

"Come, John, man—wash up and be leaving. It was only a day the judge sent ye down for—for cursing the law, John, and that's wrong. But that ye lost the case, that's bad, too, what with the wife and yer crippled arm and all. But Judge Van Hart's a good man, John—and I doubt if any man in all the county was sorrier for ye than he—but it was law, John."

The quarry worker took his knife and soiled tobacco and bit of string and went away without word. When a man's fifty and on the ebb of strength, and has felt failure, and thinks of wife and children as he sits holding his empty sleeve, and knows he has lost against the face of a society organized ruthlessly to crush the loser, he has little heart for the comfortings of the jailer.

He went away a new-born criminal. Before, merely

the discard of the cities, a mechanic, worker on the structural iron of great buildings until cast aside in this dangerous trade for younger men and more alert. Well, that was right—the old worker faces that. But Lindstrom was burly and strong. Surely in the country, the fat land, there was place for a man stout of heart and willing, too old to work at his trade, but too young to lose hope. He would save himself from the slag heap of the cities, where in the blatant religion of success, he who fails is either vicious or lazy. So he came to the river bottoms where his wife had heard of an uncle squatted on unclaimed land and truck-raising for a livelihood. There, crowding into Uncle Michigan's house-boat, which had grown through the years by the addition of several crazy lean-tos until it was now a rambling cottage, the Lindstroms were one of the few very poor families of the rich county. They were big with the hope of the country five years ago. They did not know that, first of all, the farmer is a capitalist, and the city man turned adrift there, penniless and with mouths to feed, is helpless. John became a day worker in Tanner's quarries; his wife, a Tennessee woman, long expatriated from her hills, whining to be gone forever of Chicago, was now a querulous invalid, what with labor and child-bearing. There Lindstrom fought his inevitable losing fight; but with Old Michigan's truck-raising, which cloaked his whisky peddling, and John's wages they all got on until Tanner's quarry machine crushed the chief bread-winner's hand.

So it was damn the law! When one is old, bewildered, helpless before all these smooth phrases and

precedents, all this fine talk of sleek men to the jury, and one hears the judge direct the verdict against one, does one mince words? Why, then, did the lawyers say one had a right if the judge knew so glibly different? A good workman, too, on the rock pile; quiet, steady, matching his strength against the young men, those terrible, merciless young men who fling the discard aside, take his job and go whistling down the road, pipe in mouth, when the day is done! And now, broken, crushed, bewildered with the smooth talk of the lawyers, and knowing one has lost—does a man take it calmly when the judge sentences him and his children to beggary? No, he raises his fist—and damn the law!

Lindstrom came back the quarry road to his shanty. He sat across the table from his two freckled sons and the old, one-legged soldier whisky-smuggler smoking his pipe by the wood-box. They feared to question the returned jailbird; when his wife whined some complaint, as she held the baby to her flat breast, stirring her pots over the stove, he growled a rough tenderness.

"There, woman. The jail—you can smell it on me, but no matter. And the work—we can do a bit yet with the garden. It's here we'll stay, for I'll not lift my face in town again. They heaped the filth of the law on me, and my children's name. We'll have no more of their town and schools and all. If I'm no fit man for 'em, my lads are not—we'll take no more of their time and money."

She looked up in her slattern fright. He ruled them with his heavy Puritan's righteousness. Even Aurelie, Michigan's gipsy limb of a girl, under John's foster-

parenthood these five years since the Lindstroms came, had to be still before him.

"Ah, John!" the mother cried. "Take the children out of school? Knute ready for his seventh grade, and Aurelie in high school. And like to graduate if we can get the dress and all!" She rubbed her bony hand across her chin to ease the sting of the burning pork fat and muttered, "My man's crazy!"

"Damn their schools," he growled—"and courts. God will hold us safe, not man with his fine talk of justice. I'll have no more of it."

Old Michigan took out his pipe to murmur. "John, man—don't take it so bitter. There's enough know you're an honest man. A day in jail—who'll think worse of ye for that?"

The quarryman lopped his big frame over a chair at the table. Year by year he had come to extend his authority over Michigan's sorry house and patch of land snatched from the willow slough of the ever-changing river bed. The old Confederate had taken himself to the woods when the Lindstroms overran him too much; Aurelie had been the bond that held him to his niece's family—it made something of a home for her, mean as it might be.

They were well through the meal when the woman's brother, Albert, came in. He sidled to the tin basin by the window, took off his celluloid cuffs and began to wash his thin red wrists, like a man who would rather not be squarely seen; he snuffed the cold water into his straggling beard as if it put sting into his rabbit's heart. He combed his hair and pulled on his cuffs and sat down with a fatuous smile. A man of towns,

he had followed the family from Chicago because he was too weak to stand alone, always the under dog, finding odd jobs about the country; a canvasser and agent, forever the recipient of catalogues and contracts from mail-order houses and manufacturers and medical fakirs, forever talking up his nostrums and gimcracks, peddling about the farms and villages; a ringer of door-bells, a beseecher of women, a pleader to buy, shuffling in and out of gates with his pitiful cards and dodgers—one of those men who sit to be preached to and stand in line to be counted, with his weak chin and flaring ears and vapid eyes bulging—one of those men in short, whom the undertakers are forever burying.

John, the burly religious fanatic, with his defeated bull strength, hated him—at best he gave the tolerating contempt of the man of overalls for the shabby collar-and-cuffs pretense of the pedler—collar always soiled, cuffs always frayed. Lindstrom glowered at him a moment and went on eating.

"Ah, the good soup!" said the pedler, warming his hands over its steam—"it puts heart in a man. Michigan, you can dig your potatoes on this—and Knute, it'll get your lessons, eh?" He smiled vaguely at the boys—he really felt like somebody to-night, for he had earned two dollars and he was planning how he could present it to them all, raking over his sordid store of cheer and evasions before handing it out. His sister, with the ailing baby, tried to warn him; they both had had their strength sucked out by the great Dane's masterfulness—they were not yet far enough removed from their hill-cracker ancestry to find assertion in the air of the North.

Michigan looked at him craftily; he knew John's mood of murder, and Albert, the fool, was tempting it. "It's coolin'," muttered the patriarch. "There's a nip o' frost done comin' this way. It's time the fodder was in."

"Well, well," said the pedler with his cracked gaiety, "there'll be work for Knute and Peter after school this week."

The wife glanced up. Would they never get off this topic of the schooling? John put his heavy hand across the table.

"There'll be no more schooling."

"Ah, John!" the wife wailed, "will you ruin us all with your pride? There'll be an honest way for us all yet!"

The pedler fidgeted with the button of some church league on his lapel. Down in his crouching soul some faith flickered which gave him a martyr's comfort against John's ascetic will. "The Lord will provide," he sniffled—"the Lord be by ye, John." He was facing the winter in his scanty summer suit, but he could give cheerfully his two dollars to the family if it "was Lord's work."

"Lord's providing, and not man's," growled John, and he flayed them all again with his truculence. He had changed in the night from a stolid, yet all-caring father to an inward-burning fanatic, a hunted outlaw of spirit. They could not voice the fright he gave them. When he looked at his sons they could not eat so fearful were they of this new father, this new man of the jail. His glance went about the silent faces. "Where's Aurelie? The girl's not here," he went on.

"She's plannin' her new dress," the mother quavered, "with some woman in town. She'd have it new now, and then lay it away for the party at high school. John, man, she'd be the prettiest of them all with the new dress. Michigan here, he tried to save the money, didn't ye, uncle?"

Michigan laughed softly; his hairy face lit up. The scared lads let down from their strain. Aurelie! She could brighten even the meagerness of the quarry shanty, then.

"She's too much attention, now," growled John. "She's got some French trick of making every loafer at the billiard corner look at her. She's better away from gowns and parties—aye, and that priest from Earlville over every month to talk to her. I'll not have it—she's too much in the town's eye for a decent girl."

"Be still," Knute blurted out of the sob in his throat, "she's coming."

The eyes of all followed to the door. Even John did not raise his black humor now she was here. She was in the door listening with a trifle of self-consciousness, the long lashes of her eyes quivering. Then she was among them, dropping breathlessly, as if from a run, into the chair at Michigan's side, and looking about with an odd defiant gaiety. Then she held her plate forth decisively, with a child's prompting.

"Mother, I'm hungry. So's Peter," she caught up the boy's plate and held it, with a bright sidelong glance of affection at the tow-headed Danish boy. The woman helped them with a murmur. Michigan's black scoured paw came to Aurelie's slim hand under the table. Then she kissed him. It was a strange drama

in the acrid dissembling of human feeling that held in the quarryman's house. But it stood like a bloom against their meagerness. She had called the gaunt cracker woman "mother," but she could not have been farther from them all if she had stepped from a child's story book. The two foster-brothers looked with uneasy fondness on this daughter of the South who was scolding them now in some playful vivacity for their dirty hands. When she talked she leaned in a pose whose grace again detached her from them all, a thing not to be helped or hindered, so native was it to her, so foreign to their breeding.

Aurelie had changed amazingly from the barbaric child-heart of her Louisiana days when she had run away to the Cajun balls, kneeling to fix a woven cap of hyacinths in her hair as she stared at her reflection in the water, and baffling the lumbermen with her French of the swamp people. She was slender now, but a lithe girl and not a child; her face was dark, mobile, tender or at times hard; her black eyes had the flash of rebellious tempers and coaxing temptations—the Dane boys adored her, yet not even did little Peter for an instant suppose she was his real sister. Everything about her, her grace, her quickness, her nimble tongue; her little rosary hung on the white bureau in the tiny chamber just off the kitchen, whose door she had hung in red chintz; her habit of taking early coffee, black, thick, drugging—which Michigan made at rising and brought to her bedside where she sipped it and chattered with the old bootlegger—her defiant assertion that she was a Catholic, whatever that meant, her smatter of French and Spanish; her memories of wild

and wonderful years, which now, in the crowded discomfort of the quarry home, took on the aspect of unthinkable romance—all these set her off from the family, from the dull decent town, from the whole world.

She was the best rifle-shot in the county; she could trap rabbits in the snow, and catch crawfish with a bit of twisted willow; she could guide a dugout log in the flooded sloughs with a trick of the wrist that the northerners knew nothing about; and she had scandalized the town her second year in school by challenging the best of their callow sprinters and outrunning them hopelessly on track and in the hills. That fixed her forever in the town's granny soul; other girls could not well befriend her; she was "that girl from the Pocket", or "Old Michigan's girl", or "Frenchy", and had the doubtful distinction of being the only Catholic in Rome, Iowa, except Old Mowry, the undertaker. In the Midlands the Pope was a person who might upset republican institutions any time or other.

So she had grown up apart. Never was she so happy as when fishing with Michigan along the river,—Aurelie with her gipsy liveliness; the old rebel stumping along, baiting her hook, protesting at her excess of spirits, loquacious and reminiscent. "Never done growed up," he crowed delightedly. "Same as when I stole ye out of the convent in N'Awlyns and brought ye up to occupy the land!"

She had a marvelous aptitude for studies she liked and an unconquerable aversion to all else. She walked the miles to school from the quarry shanties, proud, ridiculously proud, coming into the recitation rooms, speaking to none and reciting with a composure and

exactness that made the provincial teachers gasp. Then she went along the leafy road to the woods homeward again, proud and alone, her red gown a splash of color against the staid Midland hills.

Still, to track rabbits through the snows, to skate with the boys on lonely treacherous sloughs; when spring came, to tap the sugar trees on the bluffs for stringy syrup and gather nuts in the fall—when one is young and pretty and has dreams and passions, all this does not atone; when one has a love of admiration and a feeling that one is lovable and should be finding happiness in the good days of youth, it is hard to walk the bleak way home knowing that other girls are going out to the "Geek" parties and to the dances at Odd Fellows' Hall. Those gay nights she studied algebra in the stuffy little kitchen where Lindstrom's dusty quarry shirt and shoes lay before the red-hot stove, and his snorings, and the whine of the baby, and the mother's fretting in the next room, came above the rasp of the frozen trees on the eaves. She laid down books to stare out on the icy hills, the last arc on the road to town lighting the way to all that warmth, all that brightness, all that laughter from which she was shut off. She was glad when summer came and she could climb the mighty balustrades of the bluff and look eastward to where the great river ran. Out of the South she had come; and surely beyond the walls of this laborer's hut, its smell of sweaty clothes, and over the encircling hills one could find life, one could find one's heart beating faster. Yet she did not complain; her proud gaiety was her shield.

After a while, as the sodden meal went on, the Ten-

nessee woman spoke what they all knew had to be broken to the last comer. "Ye'r pop Lindstrom, he says there'll be no more school, Aurelie. He's been a God-fearin' man, and hard-workin', and no child o' this house'll go face the disgrace o' the town, he says. Knute and Peter and you'll not go, he says."

Aurelie laid down her fork and looked at John. If the hope of Heaven had been dashed from her she would not have been more blank with fear. "Why—I graduate next year!"

"You'll go no more." John glowered at her breathlessness. "Damn all the town. Their laws and schools, they're not for poor folk! I say, damn the law, and I'm a man o' God!"

"But I? I *must* get through! And Knute and Peter, here—"

She looked at them and then at Michigan, growing more frightened. The old soldier shook his head with some hopeless warning. Then, watching Lindstrom a moment, she sprang up quivering. "I'll go—I'll *go!*" she cried.

"You'll not," he muttered doggedly. "You'll die first."

She stared at him again, and then turned flying to her tiny room. They heard the crash of her body on her white little bed, painted and gilded by her own hands. The others went on docilely with their eating.

Knute, out in the dark, feeding the cats later, felt Aurelie seize him fiercely. She dragged him to the rail fence and shook him again.

"Knute, ain't you going any more?"

"That's what paw said." The boy blubbered, and

her hot arm went about him, her sleeve brushed his tears. "I gotta stay home and help clear land. All winter, paw says. . . . And I was a-goin' to get elected to the Literary Society and now paw"—his voice broke—"I gotta stay home and cut brush."

"No!" she cried out. "No—*no!*"

"Yes. Paw says the jedge, he done it. He says the law made us all bad. 'Tain't for poor folks. It's for rich. Paw says damn everybody!"

"Don't you mind." The girl beat the rail with her fists. "We'll run away, Knute! I'm going to do something, and you can run off and maybe work on the railroad—a train agent or something! Or go be a soldier like we used to play! Or we'll run off and build a boat and drift down-river!"

Whenever Aurelie rebelled it was always "down-river" with her.

"No, paw, he said God was with him, and damn everybody!"

She stared into his tear-stained face. "Knute, I just got to go to school. I got to be a *lady!* And have heaps of money! And do lots of things for you and Peter! Oh, Knute, I know how!"

He watched her dark and tragic face. "Know how? What you going to do, Aurelie?" He faltered his horror. Whatever it was, Aurelie would do it.

"I"—she breathed tensely—"am a-going to get married!"

Knute looked fearfully at the jade. "Married!"

"Yes, sir! To a rich man, *sometime!* And have *everything!* But first I got to go to school and be a *lady!*"

"Oh, Aurelie—" Knute gazed wildly away at the town lights. "Who?"

Then without a word, she pushed him aside and fled out into the dark. He saw a trail of dust arise in the quarry road, but she was over the fence and among the laurel and grape-vines. She ran, as the deer run, from boulder to boulder of the cliff face, and when she came out on the verge, still ran, her arm against her beating heart, but her eyes fixed on the dusk below her.

The tree-enshrouded town lay there: a few lights twinkling drowsily, the clock in the court-house an opaque blur, and a single church spire visible in the shadowy masses. A farmer's wagon rattled up a cut of hill road homeward, a dog barked sleepily, and a cow-bell tinkled somewhere on the content of the rich land. But the girl raised her hands above the sumac fringe from which the gossamer floated to her face; she held them off as if appealing from the fat and sober deadness of this life to the world beyond. There was the river winding south under the first light of the September moon. There was the East. She edged forward in the red sumac until her feet were on the last bit of the cliff, where one stood with infinity beneath, the shadows so real, the wooded valley so much a phantom.

"Now, I'll go," she whispered; "now he'll have to take me!"

And staring eastward, her heart ceasing to throb with the rapture of her flight, a little sigh came to her lips. Listening she heard a twig snap, a step below on the cliff trail. She crouched Indian-like in the brush, and then, when some one uprose in the path, she flung

"I can't keep on meeting you every night alone, here—"

herself upon him, clasping him, laughing, crying, kissing him.

"Oh, boy!" she cried, "I'm going with you—to East and college—anywhere!" She reached a hand out to the purple gulf beyond the hill—"There! I can't keep on meeting you every night alone, here—and be good. It isn't in me—I can't—I *can't!*"

She fought to hold him closer, crying her passion, caressing him with little love-words of her vagabond childhood, in French and Spanish; and ever coming back to her kisses and the rapture of his embrace. "You can't leave me—oh, Harlan—you can't ever again!"

CHAPTER IV

IN THE WAY OF LOVERS

PRESENTLY they went along the backward path, on one side the stubble and oak groves silvered by the moon, and on the other the abysmal valley beyond the sumacs on the cliff's edge. His arm was about her, and at times she stopped him to look up into his grave face, to brush back the curls from his temples and tell her story. She moved him with this trust; all their secret nights together this amazing summer she had been a thing of wild woods' lightness, grace and gaiety, a defying little Cinderella, proud of her beauty, eccentric in her dress and posing. He had not stopped to think where it would all end. His cool blood of the East had never reckoned on such passion as had, summer long, flamed in her; he could not guess that she was thanking God for his strength which held her purely, even while the call of youth to youth was in her eyes. Summer night and young night have no morality, and either lust or virtue is an easy thing, costing nothing of the price the years bring.

"I wondered," she whispered, "if you'd come tonight! After the trial and your father sent Papa John to jail. I hate him! I wanted to hate *you!*" She shivered in the moonlight; then kissed him. "I'll never come again and meet you here—oh, boy, I won't go

on *loving* you!" She stood with closed eyes, the black hair falling straight from its parting down over her ears giving her face the fixity of a penitent. But in her hair she had put, as always, a flower. He drew her to him and kissed the blossom, and she struggled murmuring: "It's not right—you know how weak I am . . . and then, to-morrow—next day—you'll go leave me!"

"Wild bird," he whispered, with his grave smile. "While it's to-night, let's not think of that!" And at her quick surrender in his arms, the curious remorseful rapture that had stung him all this summer of his vacation, meeting her here alone, came to him. By days he thought of it with cool reassertion of his blood and tradition—he really could not love her, he reasoned; yet by night he met her there and, laughing, gave up to it and to her. He tried to tell himself that it was all a summer trysting, that she would forget with the cooling days and he away. But she had seemed stupefied by this miracle of loving him, the completeness of yielding. Her days she went about in a dream, lying blithely for his sake, protecting his name, living only for the hour she could steal to the hills and await him.

"It's monstrous," she cried, "putting him in jail! What did the lawyers say we'd win for? It's bad enough to be crippled, but to lose and be imprisoned. It's just devilish—your father and everything!"

He muttered some patient phrase of his culture and understanding.

"Dear heart, it's rough. But you wouldn't understand. His own negligence was part of the accident—

that's how the law holds it. And the law, my dear—the judge interprets that as he finds it."

"What did Lafe Mason say we'd win for?"

He smiled at the outrage in her tone. "It's a way they have. Maybe Mason thought he could win."

"Nobody could win against Tanner in court!"

"Aurelie?" He shook her sternly. If she had damned his paternity it would not have hurt more. "My father is the judge, you must remember."

"And he sent Papa John to jail—for nothing. For swearing? Why, I can swear, too!"

He smiled his patience. "Lindstrom committed the worst of contempt."

"Contempt, Who cares for that? Suppose you had lost—suppose the case meant *everything* to you? Your family at home, waiting—hungry, Harlan? Really hungry, and you saw you were crippled and cheated and done for? There's times when Knute and I have gone to school with no breakfast, and for lunch we dug wet butternuts from under the leaves. And I'd go to school with a flower in my hair and laugh and nobody'd know! Just proud—I wouldn't even tell you!"

"Aurelie—not hungry?" There was horror in his tone. Not to have enough to eat—to his class and breeding—was disreputable.

She smiled up through her tears. "*Mon Dieu,* yes—but what of that? Many times we've been hungry!"

He was more shocked than she could guess. Hunger was a luxurious state of mind incident to picnics and athletics. One never really met people hungry from having nothing to eat. And to dig nuts and eat them

and then come into town, proud—oh, so very proud—with a flower in one's hair, marching into the recitation room at high school without deigning to speak to any one! He thought back to the time he was a senior, and Aurelie had been—a gipsy child with short dresses and long legs—he wondered what an amazing change had come to her in the four years. He had forgotten her until this lazy summer when, fishing along Sinsinawa, he had come upon her gravely watching his threshing of a pool for bass, and she had mockingly derided him. She met him again hunting, and showed him an otter's den in a wild morass of the bottoms, when none would have believed there was an otter in the state. After that—well, he met her day by day, and then by night—a unique creature, he said at first, laughably untamed. And he amused himself by taming her and ended by loving her. To be French and Catholic, to come "up-river" out of a corner of the South, foreign and unknown—to know the outdoors as the wild alone know it—this was the summer madness that seduced him.

"Hungry? Why the first winter here, when Michigan's house-boat stranded in the Pocket and the old Indian woman who raised me, died of pneumonia, we were always hungry—we trapped any sort of animal to live. And when the Lindstroms came and lived with us, it wasn't much better—sometimes. Then they started me to school—and I couldn't read or write when I was twelve! Ain't I done well, Harlan?"

"Adorably. But—" he sighed.

"I know. You want me to go on and graduate—and be a regular lady! Just to show everybody! Oh, and

I will, dear! I promised myself I *would*—just for *you!* Everything's just for *you!*"

He was laughing, again with that curious hurt in his heart. And as he held her, murmuring his fondness, he winced at the remembrance of the days to come. His mother's stateliness, the Van Hart tradition—Harvard, his law career—vague and of the well-ordered future, but he knew that on him was the obligation of his parents' devotion, the singleness of their pride of class and environ. Aurelie—what was all this to her, and what could she be to it?

"And now you'll go East," she went on. "And if I can't go to school I don't know what I shall do. Oh, Harlan, life's so snarly—one can laugh and be proud, but it hurts! And to have Papa John in jail—he's rough with me, but that hurts, too!"

He was still, and at length something like a sigh came. "I wish you could know my father, Aurelie. Why, he'd be the first man to help Lindstrom if he could—and Uncle Michigan, and Knute and Peter and all of you! He's the gentlest, most tender-hearted man I know. But you see John damned the court—that damned everything father stands for—and his father before him—and behind that hundreds of years of—of"—he paused, wondering if she could realize what he meant—"well, of our family!"

"We don't want charity," she cried, "we wanted justice!" And then at the hurt in his eyes she went on with quiet passion: "All this summer I'd been so happy! Just waiting here, unknown and alone for you. Oh, it was wonderful to have you come to love me!" She held out her hands triumphantly. "Of all

the girls you knew—High Street girls—you came up here to me—alone."

"Aurelie," he muttered, "that's one thing I'm sorry for."

She looked up quickly, and he went on slowly. "Mother wouldn't like it."

She tried dimly to grasp this reverence. What it meant of upbringing was beyond her in her meager and unadvised idea of honor. She had a sense of some strength back of him that had made his character, that had made the great land. Vaguely she felt it meant a home, a large house with wide lawns about it, like the Van Harts'; good living, a surrey or motor at the door; and the easy and welcome flitting of fair girls in cool white such as she had seen—a beautiful way of life linking all clean and clever people together everywhere but never extending to a quarryman's shack. It was this blind groping to understand his world that made her humble with him, and so proud without him, to brave the ignorance she knew was hers. The conscience of her lover was quite beyond her. For with him, though youth might be high, and blood hot—and there was adventure in the September nights—yet always he would think back to the obligation of his birth and breeding.

And she? Well, such a little thing it takes to make or defeat one—such a little thing! The sort of girl one meets unknown to all in the moonlight.

Aurelie was shot through with her old jealousy of this mother, this college in the East, and all the brilliant world that claimed him. "Your mother wouldn't like it? Or *me!* I *hate*"—then she bit her lip—"Oh,

ll not spoil it, Harlan—our last night together! And 's only another year as you say. You'll be free and n work—" She stopped again, suddenly fearing. What would that freedom mean? He had never asked r to marry him. They had lived an idyl of the hills, e moon shimmering over the purple valley, the river inding to the sea; all the glory of the summer nights ey had felt, but never had they taken thought beyond it.

He went on gently, but troubled by the tenseness of her face: "Only a year. And the East isn't far, dear. Only two days' travel or so!"

The East was an unknown splendor to her. It looked too critically, with the cool measuring of his mother, the same reserve she had seen at times in his own eyes. And she—she was ready to give all, to pour out her life at his feet. She took his arm and put it about her and looked down at the front of her simple little gown. "I don't know what I'll do. I was only going to school because of you, Harlan. I hate it! Only for you . . . and now Papa Lindstrom won't have that. And he's hurt, and his wife's no good—just worn out, and the boys are too little to help. Sometimes I think I ought to work—perhaps clerk at Dickinson's grocery."

He smiled at the idea of Aurelie, the wild hawk, clerking! She would not stand it a day. Then he winced. He thought of Elise, the grocer's daughter, and her amiable patronizing of the town girls who worked there; of his mother giving her orders of a morning from the surrey to some young woman who brought out a scoopful of sugar for inspection and

apologized for a delay. Aurelie—she would throw it into the customer's face if she fancied a slight!

She read his thoughts. "You think I couldn't, don't you? Oh, boy, I could—for *you!* You hold me from being rebellious and ridiculous. I could just do anything for you—run away with you, or go to work—just *anything!*"

He felt her trembling in his arms. "Sometimes, Aurelie, I think we ought to go down to the house and make a clean breast of it. Tell them everything—that I love you, dear!"

Her voice choked with gratefulness—dimly she could feel what a sacrifice he was making. But now the prospect frightened her. "Oh, no—not yet. Your father—he'd hate me, now!"

"Hate you? Why, Aurelie, he'd help you! Maybe he'd get a place for you at the bank—keeping books or something. But you can't keep books. You're all lightness and temper and lovableness—you'd have to have the outdoors, or you'd not live. But if you *did* have a place that would pave the way for you"—he hesitated, wondering how to say it and not hurt her absurd pride—"raise you, so that some day people would sort of forget!"

"Forget?"

"Where you came from, dear. Down the river with Old Michigan—and that you haven't even a name except a borrowed one from Lindstrom." He laughed to smooth it over—"Oh, but it's funny! You're a wild hawk, Aurelie. I remember when you used to come into town with Knute to sell rabbits, and the coldest winter day you always had a bit of bright leaf stuck

somewhere about you—like an Indian girl! I thought you were at first. Then I forgot all about you and went away to college, and when I next heard you were in high school; and then this year I met you in the hills, here."

"And made me love you, Harlan. Oh, it wasn't right—it wasn't right!"

Then, in the way of all men and all lovers, he laughingly kissed and comforted her. They went down a moon-filled glen and up a slope, and there the silent town lay, the court-house tower white as silver above the robing trees. Sinsinawa was tinkling down from the highlands at their feet, and across it a trail lay to the first street at the foot of the bluff. In a window of a cottage tucked at the foot of the rock, they saw the blur of a lamp, and he knew it was Wiley Curran idling over his editorials, for the graceless renegade of Rome had a way of turning night into day and writing or wasting hours when decent folk were all abed.

And when it seemed that he was about to leave her at this accustomed parting place, she clung to him suddenly whispering: "Take me with you—oh, take me with you! I can't let you go—oh, I can't!"

She held so tightly to him that he could not go if he had tried, and after long vain comforting, murmuring to her all he had said a hundred times, he slowly unfolded her arms and looked down at her intently. A sense of her great loneliness without him, without her school, without the bit of aspiration and of vague hope she had come to find, touched him as it had never done before.

"Aurelie," he muttered, "I can't do that—you know

I can't. I must finish school and buck into work. Before I—I—marry you—" he blurted tenderly. "But you ought to have a place—something to do and—*be* while we're waiting, dear! And I'm going to take you to mother and tell her all!"

She looked up frightened at his stubborn face. "No —no—wait!"

"First I'll tell Wiley Curran. You know that editor? He's my best friend here—the only one I care about particularly in town. And I trust him in things of this sort—he could look at it right and honestly, without any foolishness about my family and that kind of thing. Dear, we'll go tell Wiley, and if he says to tell mother and father, we'll do it—and have the whole matter out!" He cried out joyously, brave with the hazard of it. He felt suddenly a man going out to a man's world and work, knowing that he left her with the honor of his faith; and this brave knowledge was worth all the miserable travesties of "good form", the smug and easy conventions of his "set". These were well enough for old women to fiddle over, but they were not for youth, nor love, nor the glory of this first protecting manhood and its surety of the years to come, that future which would achieve all, ennoble all, redeem all.

He saw suddenly her own fine achievement. She, who gave her whole life to him, as one would place a rose in his hand. She would sit small, pensive, alone, waiting for him in the hills, or in the squalid quarry house; she would wear old and faded gowns when she loved brightness and pleasant things; about her the corn fields would crown the hills green, and turn to

bronze shields before the winter; and spring bring again its black damp to the woods—and always she would wait, if he asked her—wait, wait, wait! Always he felt this steadfastness above her impulses and rebellions. With him she might find her real self, rise to any station, become anything, so great he felt her love to be.

"Aurelie, we're not afraid! Why, dear—we ought to have done it long ago! Why, mother—after all, she's the *best* mother in the world! Why, a *word* from her would make everything different for you, Aurelie—just to have it known she was your friend." He was taking her on exultantly, now, by the trail down through the laurel and boulders which led to the end of the street back of Curran's house. She was frightened; she had never seen him so ardent, so rebellious.

"To-night?" she cried—"oh, Harlan—my dress!"

"It's a dear little dress!"

Her hand went to the flower in her hair; she was dumb before his resolution.

"Don't touch it! It's a bit of flame—just like you." He laughed. This was so easy! This was what they should have done long ago! All his life had been without secrecy or reproach; and now, to take his sweetheart by the hand and go down buoyantly to the town to face them all! How easy it was under the witchery of the September moon!

They were both laughing, nervously yet with happiness, when he lifted her down the last rock among the night-damp leaves and burst through the grape tangle to the street, crossing Sinsinawa, looking down in the pools at their reflections. They were coming to the

first houses, the lamp in the window, and somewhere the murmur of voices from neighbors visiting on the lawns—his people, kind true people. They should be her people now. This was the beautiful answer he would make to conventions and curious eyes and tongues—to take her by the hand and lead her among them. Love was enough; love was all—and they should see!

They came about the corner of the old *News* building. On the platform walk a man stood who was staring off so strangely above the sugar trees of the Square that Harlan did not, at first, recognize Wiley Curran himself. Under one arm he had the exchanges from the night's mail; at his feet, in the moonlight, lay an envelope, and in his hand was the key-ring with which he always opened his letters.

Harlan drew his sweetheart on. But not until they were directly before Curran did the latter appear to notice them. Then he stared down at the opened letter in his hand and muttered: "The girl's got it—wait till the old town hears that!"

"Wiley?"

"Hello, Harlan," responded Wiley absently. Then his blank eye fell upon Aurelie. He started. "Why, how did *you* know?"

She looked puzzledly at him. "By George!" the editor roared: "did you hear from 'em?" Then he seized her hand frantically and shook it. "Miss Lindstrom—it's the greatest thing that ever hit the old town!"

She had no idea what he meant. Harlan interposed. "What's the matter, Wiley?"

"Don't you know? Then what the mischief are you bringing *her* here for?" The editor shook the letter before them. "This?"

"Aurelie? Why we don't know anything you're talking about? What?"

"Aurelie," went on the editor, "you've won the beauty contest!"

She continued to stare at him. "You got it!" cried Curran. "The Sunday editor of the Chicago *Chronicle* wrote me this—he wants a column of dope about you. They'll print your picture—the prize winner!"

"Prize winner!" Harlan shouted. "You're crazy! How did the *Chronicle* get *her* picture?"

"I sent it to 'em. Last spring when the Chicago paper started this beauty contest, Vawter, the photographer, and I were looking over that bunch of high-school pictures—the junior bunch. And we sent three of 'em—just for ducks we entered three of 'em! The Mills girl and Elise Dickinson—and Aurelie's. And Aurelie's won it!"

Harlan stood paling before him. "Elise—and Aurelie! The picture? What picture? I never saw any picture!"

"It was a peach. Sort of Spanish, with lilacs in her hair! Vawter caught something in it that was indescribable." He stared again at Aurelie, hungrily, fascinated, as if seeking the thing that men would call beautiful in her. "Why, girl, I never looked at you before—never thought you were so—so—good-looking!"

Harlan tore the letter from his hand and was reading it.

The editor looked at the girl's mute and puzzled face. "The most beautiful girl in the West—that's the way they'll spring it! The syndicate—thirty of the biggest papers in the United States—will publish that picture, and twenty million people will see it!" He danced up and down. "Aurelie, you little madcap, you'll be the most famous woman in the country!"

Still she looked at her lover expectantly, uncomprehending.

Harlan seemed gasping for breath. Then he crushed the letter and slammed it at the editor's feet. "Aurelie —*her* picture! You big damned fool, Wiley! *Her* picture!"

And seizing Aurelie by the hand, he whirled about and dragged her after him from the sidewalk. The editor continued to watch them until they were lost in the sugar-tree shade of High Street, still like one bereft of his senses. Even the startling idea of the judge's son and Old Michigan's girl coming from a tryst down Eagle Point trail to town together could not awaken him. After a while he muttered: "The most beautiful woman in America—maybe the whole *world!* Biggest thing ever hit the old town since Jay Smith killed himself up above the First National Bank! Aurelie, the beauty-prize winner!"

CHAPTER V

HER GLIMPSE OF LIFE

SHE went with her lover obediently,—penitent, curiously so, and as Harlan looked down at her smoothing her simple gown, going with him along the moonlit street to any adventure, to any end he wished, his heart smote him for his roughness. He had not spoken to her for some time, and the matter frightened her—it was something terrible from which he was trying to shield her; but he was angry, very angry, merely because she was pretty! *Mon Dieu,* was that it?

"I never gave any one my picture!" she burst out, at length. "I never knew anything about it!"

"I know," he muttered. "That's the hateful thing about Wiley! He ought to know better."

"Eh, I must be very good-looking!" she glanced up at him with her quick gaiety. "When they want my picture, and to print things about me. And give me a prize, Harlan!"

"Aurelie," he muttered sternly. "This is simply horrible! To be advertised—to be exploited—to have all sorts of slush written about you in the Sunday papers!"

She was puzzled, trying to understand his viewpoint. It seemed that the brilliant world had beckoned

to her, found her in her dolorous corner, her defeated and stormy little life—and he who loved her best was angry at it all!

"Oh, little girl!" he whispered, "just an hour ago I thought I was going to claim you—have you all my own, and defy the whole world for you! Just mine, Aurelie—and what we would do would be big and brave. If mother wouldn't have it, I'd run away with you! I'd go to work at anything, give up my law and chance with the firm—everything—for you!"

"Yes! And I felt like dancing, perfectly happy! And proud—oh, so proud of you! But what's the matter? I'll be famous, the editor said—and maybe rich—and go to Chicago . . . and have pieces in the paper! Oh, boy, is that so terrible? Just because I'm pretty!" She looked at him with mingled humility and rebellion. "You ought to be glad!"

His grave eyes were ruthless with some new command. He took her shoulders and held her so that she could not evade him. She stared up at him, then relaxed from her tenseness, laughing. "Oh, well, then, Harlan, I just kept on in school this year to please you —I only try anything because you want me to. And now you'd think I'd committed some crime—and I've done nothing except be pretty! Ah, Name of God! Sometimes I wish I was a Cajun girl again, back on Bayou Perot, where we lived in a grass house one time. I can remember! I wish we'd never come up here among these cold Yankees!" She clasped him passionately. "But then I love one. You don't know what that means, dear, to *me!* Down in the bayou country we're women at sixteen—we marry because

we love—oh, just as I love you—without thinking, or reason, or virtue!"

"I know," he whispered. "You've told me all."

"I saw a man killed once, down-river. A woman stabbed him and he fell on the deck right where I was playing. I don't know why, eh?" She looked at him with her alert challenge—"But I can guess! She *loved* him! Why, even when I was a child I didn't blame her. Harlan, I suppose I'm a savage now, ain't I—going to school with all those nice girls in white dresses!"

"Aurelie," he answered slowly, "I'm going away to-morrow to school. And I was going to take you to mother, to-night. Tell her everything—ask her to protect you, help you—make of you the sort of woman you can be if you had a chance. I thought you'd be waiting for me—and *trying*, always!"

Her eyes were quick with tears. Beneath her laughter they were never far away.

"I wanted you to know my mother," he went on patiently. "But I wanted you to be yourself always, too. Good and fine—the best in your gay little self, because it's all there! And now this ghastly thing of Wiley's—the furor and publicity of it. Why, my mother—she couldn't stand it!"

She watched him long; her fingers plucked slowly at a tattered leaf upon his shoulder. "Well, then," she muttered humbly, "I won't. I'll give it all up—the prize and everything—if you ask me to."

"It's too late for that."

"No, it isn't. I won't have a thing to do with 'em! My picture in the paper—or anything!"

He smiled at her simplicity. "Oh, Aurelie, I wish they'd never have discovered you!"

From the path they were descending she watched a distant patch of water touched by a mist of light. Beyond it was the East, the radiant land; over the silent hills of the river was some unknown glory beckoning her. She sighed and put by the undreamed allurement; it seemed that since she had known Harlan she was always putting something by, renouncing, struggling; trying to do or be something quite unattained. That was love, she answered—to renounce and not be embittered, to try for something better than one had, to be better than one truly was. That was it. Love meant trying!

"Nobody will have me," she went on slowly. "I won't pay any attention to 'em. I love you that way, Harlan. Just to wish my face was ugly if it pleased you. To scratch my cheeks and eyes, if you wanted me to! Just to live on here and be the bootlegger's girl from the bottoms, and never have a pretty dress. I will, if you want me to."

He did not answer for a time. She could not tell that he was conquering the lump in his throat at the pathos of her passion. "For me!" he whispered, and she nodded; and so they went on through the moonlight to his home.

They crossed the wide lawn where Palf, the great friendly Saint Bernard, came to greet them. Some one was singing in the parlors. It was Elise Dickinson, and a Schumann song; and Harlan slowly remembered that this was their last night at home before he went to Harvard and Elise to Bryn Mawr, and that all the

boys he had grown up with, played football and debated with; and all the girls he had danced with his life long, had gathered to speed him well. Elise was going too; it was partly in her honor.

He felt Aurelie falter at the music, then after his steadying glance at her, she tensed in her petite independence and went with him through the door to the library. His father and mother were there alone. The Van Hart house was the rendezvous of all the High Street young people; there was no need of bidding to its fine, open, careless welcome any one of Harlan's set. So while the guests amused themselves in the parlors the judge sat at his paper and Mrs. Van Hart was before a bookcase, the wall light upon her contour of hair and brow. There was about her the inescapable inference of breeding, that same charm of assurance, of power, of books and gentle ways, which the room itself disengaged—the grace of right living and of love, that splendid wholesomeness of the American home.

Mrs. Van Hart looked up at them in surprise. She did not recognize Aurelie. But Harlan's arm was about the stranger. The lady arose with an exclamation. "My dear, have you been hurt?"

"No," said Aurelie.

"Mother," the boy began, and dropped Aurelie's hand and stood apart in quiet dignity, "she's not hurt." His father had lowered the paper and turned his kindly eye upon them. "We came to tell you, mother, we're engaged."

He saw his mother's blue eyes narrow, heard the rustle of the newspaper in the judge's hand. From the

other room the Schumann song went on. Mrs. Van Hart checked the flutter in her voice. "Engaged—Harlan?"

"Yes. To Aurelie Lindstrom."

There was a silence, courteous, even kindly. Harlan knew at all costs they would be kindly. If the Van Harts had sent a culprit to the gallows it would be done without scene—and kindly. His mother was looking at them keenly; then she laughed, briefly, so naturally, that, for a moment, even Harlan was deceived. Then to Aurelie: "My dear—be seated."

The girl did so in a sort of dream. They had welcomed her! They had called her "dear"! It was all so unutterably different, so beautifully different! Her day of the jinnee had dawned—the most beautiful girl in all America! Harlan's home opened to her with love. Love, that was it—love graced and opened everything. Love counted nothing of her simple gown, love asked nothing of her brown hands, her want of manner, her lack of speech and knowledge of all this gentle life—love asked her in and opened all the way!

She had not seen the judge's paling face, his eyes upon his son with a crushed despair, so glorified was she with this. The mother went on: "My dear child—" She hesitated, then smiled easily. "You surprise us. It is a—a—thunderbolt!"

"All summer, mother," Harlan answered doggedly—he knew the shock they felt, if Aurelie was deceived—"we've been meeting each other. It's no sudden thing. I should have told you—I hated to deceive you"—he laughed bluntly and looked at Aurelie, perched like

a bird blinded by a light upon her chair—"well, I'm sorry for that. But now I'm going away to school, and I want you to care for Aurelie. Just to know you, mother—it will be so much to her! I wanted to bring her here, mother—home! And then this fool beauty contest that Wiley Curran got some of the town girls into—I simply couldn't stand it!"

"Yes," his mother answered. "Elise—her picture was sent. It was abominable. Mr. Dickinson telephoned to-night to ask Mr. Van Hart if something actionable could not be done about it."

Harlan laughed mirthlessly. "Elise didn't get the prize so no one'll know of *her!* But Aurelie—" His eyes went hungrily to Aurelie, dumb on her chair, striving to grasp what might be this amazing beauty, for he had never thought of that in her! The purity of her oval face, the perfect line of her small throat, her mouth, budded always with laughter, now grave as a nun, her black heavy-lidded eyes—he had merely loved them all.

"Elise," rejoined his mother briefly, "need not be mentioned now. Harlan—your engagement . . . extraordinary." She had murmured something that they could not understand. The judge, too, had muttered. If the only son had been brought home dead they would not have made a scene before their guests in the next room, so thorough was the Van Hart inheritance. The song had ceased, a buzz of gay comment followed. The lady nodded at the open door, and the judge went as if to close it. Mrs. Van Hart placed a cool and gracious hand upon Aurelie's head. "My dear," she said slowly, "I can understand. You're both

very young, and these summer nights along Sinsinawa —beautiful!" She smiled and stroked the girl's hair.

"So very young," the father repeated. "And Harlan—your way to make—a long tough battle" . . . they could not hear the rest . . . "the law . . . a jealous mistress . . . my boy . . . my boy!"

Then, before them, the judge arose and fled hastily. To Harlan it seemed he staggered in the shadow of the dining-room.

But Aurelie did not know. She seemed stupefied at all this largeness of soul. She had not dreamed such grace, such warmth, could be. Even Uncle Michigan's profane and picturesque love had not been of this amplitude. Suddenly she felt what in all her absurd and lonely pride she had never felt—a remorseless misery for her ignorance, an infinite pathos for her beggary, her vanity, her unworth—she tried to put her browned and roughed little hands away; and then, with a great humbleness, she knew there was no need. Love was about her, it understood; it covered all. She could not lift her eyes for the tears in them; she could not trust her voice to speak.

"She's the most generous little heart in all the world," Harlan was saying. "And I want you to help her, mother. All this publicity and prize-winning—we hate it! Aurelie has given it up, mother. She promised—and I want you to protect her till I come back!"

There was a silence. Mrs. Van Hart was still smiling. "What a wonderful thing youth is! And how one smiles over it later! My dear children, I don't know what to say to you. It—it has jarred us, Harlan!

And I want you both to be very discreet and cool-headed." She smiled again and with such a rare and lofty tenderness that, for a moment, Harlan was again deceived. "Harlan must go back to school this year, and Aurelie"—her breath came a trifle shorter—"my dear, I want to talk to you. And Harlan, you ought to go see the young people for a moment"—he understood the resolute authority in her tone—"and your father—he needs you, doubtless."

The son looked at her and for an instant rebellion flamed in his eyes. She ruled the home with a gracious will but one of steel. Harlan paused uncertainly. A defeated surliness arose in him. He had felt so sure, so loyal to Aurelie's wild pathos, so splendid with the strength of her renunciation for him! He had come eager to pour it forth, to exalt it and defy with it; but now his mother was in command, and behind her it seemed all the years and centuries of their forebears, their class and culture, stood. He would obey, or he would revolt, and if he did the last, there would be a crisis, cold, sharp, decisive, he could not tell exactly of what. Only he knew his mother's imperious will. He knew she was looking at him; that she was reading him. He raised his eyes steadily to hers; in them was warning.

"Yes, mother," he answered quietly and left the room.

There was silence again. Then the piano in the front room strayed to a waltz song from the latest musical show; there was laughter, a step, the rustle of a gown—a fluff of lace in the doorway, whisked past, vanished on the polished hall. Mrs. Van Hart watched

the door attentively for a time. Harlan's set was accustomed to drag the rugs aside and dance all down the hall and through the dining-room without asking of any one. And the folding doors were open.

Then her cool eyes turned to Aurelie. "How old are you, child?"

"Nineteen, almost." Aurelie was conscious now of a placid purpose in the voice. Yet it still was kind.

"You're so very slender. I didn't dream it. I remember seeing you the last time the ladies asked the children to make wreaths for the Home Week festival. You brought such quantities and had them wreathed about you. It was—striking—but I thought you were a child."

"I know," said Aurelie faintly.

She was watching the big hall door. An audacious couple had waltzed past it; the music was louder, the laughter livelier. "Some of Harlan's friends are here. Old high-school friends, Aurelie. To see him away to college. You wouldn't have me bring him back, would you?" She smiled. "You love him, you say!"

"No," answered Aurelie more faintly. "If it's his party, he ought to stay. Only—" she dreamed away, watching the door. In her eyes the lights grew to all the wondrous glamour that was calling her from somewhere; the music was something played for her long-wandering heart—it was outside, it was over the hills, it was from the splendid world!

"It *is* his party and he ought to stay," the lady smiled on. "And Aurelie, you think you love him?"

"Yes."

"And you'd give everything for him, dear?"

"Yes."

"Dear child, there's something very fine about you. But our boy—our only child, Aurelie. We reared him for a very splendid idea—a noble manhood, a brilliant career. We—I—Judge Van Hart—can do everything for him in this state. The law—politics—he's coming back here next year and going to study and work hard in the office. And he has no money—nothing. He'll have to live at home and grind away, and it will be years, Aurelie, before he can marry! You never thought of that, did you? Nor of all it might mean to him—his wife. How she could help or hinder him. And not in the slightest way would you ever injure him, would you, dear? If you *knew* your love hurt him, you'd hold it back, Aurelie, wouldn't you? You'd bid him go fight and make his way and forget you . . . I can see all this in you, dear. You offered to give up this prize-winning notoriety, as much as you could for him. Why, child, it's heroic in you."

"Oh, Mrs. Van Hart!"

"What?"

"I—I'm not used to having people talk like this to me!" Aurelie's eyes were filled again. "You're so kind! Just splendid! I never thought—I never *dreamed—*"

"Hush!" the lady whispered—"I fear they're coming!" Her hand closed over Aurelie's. "And you, dear—you'd not do a thing, or say a thing to hurt him. You'd let him go—*refuse* him if you had to—to send him off to school and into his career to win as he can win!"

"Oh, Mrs. Van Hart! Of course I would! I'd never

let him know! I'd just be brave and laugh. I never, never, thought of it!"

For an instant the lady's cool blue eyes narrowed in a suspicion of some trickery. But Aurelie uprose now, standing with her wide gaze fixed on the door where her lover had gone. Into *his* world. And she could not follow. There was no Cinderella slipper for her here!

"Our boy," the mother whispered: "if you could know—could *dream* what he means to us, Aurelie! His father—his family—"

The girl listened dumbly. The lady's voice was breaking now; and Mrs. Van Hart moved from her stately manner was something Aurelie could not imagine apart from an unthinkable tragedy.

"And you're his mother," she burst out. "Of course I know, Mrs. Van Hart! I'm a regular little heathen, but I *know!* I must have had a mother, sometime, for she left me this"—she raised the rosary from under her chin—"Uncle Michigan says I had it when he done stole me to occupy the land!"

The lady nodded sympathetically. She took Aurelie's hand. "Dear, I want to show you something." She led the girl across the room softly and by the grill and curtains of the door they stopped. "His people, Aurelie," she whispered: "his life and place. There—he's dancing now!"

Then a miracle came to Aurelie. Something that in all her wild passion and jealous freedom of the South she had not dreamed could be. She saw Harlan dancing with Elise Dickinson, saw him pass in the throng, the waltzing couples, the figures of dainty girls in

white and pink and delicate blues. And the music, dreamy and exquisite, calling to her heart all she had read or felt might be of light and laughter and goodness—all that one with a soul to love would love, even as one starved. Saw and was unmoved by jealousy, by passion, by resentment or desire. Only she felt some pure and lofty pity tug her heart, whether for Mrs. Van Hart, or Harlan, or herself she could not tell. Only she no longer felt the little fool, absurd in her pride, but as though she had accomplished some wonderful thing that raised her above every one, even in this great lady's eyes.

Yes, she could look dumb and clear-eyed on Harlan dancing with Elise, and without desire or evil. She drew back and held the curtains down and nodded to the mother.

"I'm afraid," she said—"I'll tell him so." She moved toward the veranda door across the room and there she nodded again. "If he loves me, Mrs. Van Hart, he'll come back to me, anyway, if it was years and years! But I won't let him—never—never—never!"

Then, as she turned to go, she was conscious that Harlan was in the other door. Harlan, and behind him the laughing group of dancers. He saw her just as she stepped into the cool October dark; and midway, under the lights, his mother, gracious, smiling, turned to the guests in welcome. And a great fear shot across his face. He checked a cry as he broke from Miss Dickinson's arm and dashed across the room. But quick as he was, his mother was before him, in the doorway,

blocking his egress, yet carelessly, unnoted, her arm to the frame.

"Mother!" he shouted. "What have you done?"

For answer she looked at him. And Aurelie, outside, a wraith melting in the moonlight under the maples, turning her head, saw the mother's face. It was tense with a desperate and beautiful hardness, convulsed with horror, yet controlled as by the art of an actress; and her slender figure was a steel in spring set against him. Aurelie gave a gasp of admiration as she fled—terror and admiration, for it was as if Harlan was about to strike the woman in the doorway.

"What have you done?" he whispered. "What *have you done?*"

His mother's hand was on his. She turned to the gay little groups who were now strolling from the music-room, gracious, imperturbable, victorious. He stood staring out at the flick of the leaves. Once he blurted a man's savagery upon her, and once he turned to go. But they were all about him now, laughing. Elise came to him by the window where he again was staring out.

"What's the matter, Harlan? You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"I have." Again he fought his desperate insurgence to quit them all, to curse them all—to shout his anger and his humiliation at them all and leave. But he smiled, after a moment, into Elise's friendly eyes, bantering chummy eyes; in a little while he was himself, gracious, imperturbable.

The Van Hart hereditament won.

CHAPTER VI

TO OCCUPY THE LAND

AURELIE sped up the narrow road that skirted the rocky face of Eagle Point bluff, on one side the creek shrouded with laurel and sumac, on the other the uncouth board fences of the rear lots of the town. She did not heed her steps. Once, on a rise of the path, she stopped and gazed stonily back at the lights of the house. At last she seemed to understand that she had been bowed out, dismissed in a manner so marvelously gracious that she, the little fool, had not known it—she had stood with a heart so full of gratefulness that she had not dared trust her voice; she had given all with an inexplicable rapture of renunciation. She was burning with a fear that she had been outrageously tricked, and then a knowledge that, in some desolating way, the mother was right.

"She never shook hands with me," the girl whispered and climbed on, her pale face turned to the hills, "she just *smiled!* And had her way! Oh, I wish I could do that—that's being a *lady!*" Then she turned fiercely to look back. "I hate 'em—all of 'em! They're different. Harlan's different—I see *now!*"

Then a last faint note of the piano came on the night wind, and she shut her ears with her hands and fled on to gain the cliff, up, anywhere, to silence and to

freedom. She burst around the buttress of rock where the road ended in Eagle Point trail, and there, directly behind the *News* office fence, a man in shirt-sleeves was emptying a basket of bottles down the creek bank. The girl almost struck him as she sped across the foot-bridge. He stopped his task, looked up, cried after her, and then followed. She reached the trail and heard him toiling on among the boulders.

"Aurelie!" he gasped: "What's the matter?"

She did not answer and he leaped on. But the girl gained swiftly on him, steep as the ascent was, until he saw her slip on a pinnacle of rock, heard her cry out and pitch down into a hollow filled with dry leaves. He dashed on to find her a prisoner in the Pocket, waist deep in the leaves, sullen, breathing hard, her hair disordered. She would not look at him.

"Aurelie—what on earth's the matter?"

"I fell and broke my arm."

He leaped down and struggled to her. They both were panting. "You're suffering!" Mr. Curran gasped.

She laughed and flung a bloody little hand up to him. He saw her tense and tragic face; there was more than mortal hurt there.

He took her arm and she rebelled, pulling it away until she writhed with pain. But he made her sit, and tore his handkerchief to bind the cut, after examining it.

"It's not broken, Aurelie! Only gashed—maybe sprained."

"I wish it was broken—everything!"

He could hear her heart beat as he bent to bind the wrist. "You little savage—running off wild like this.

And the prize winner, Aurelie! The most beautiful girl in all the West, they say!"

She stared dumbly at him. Perhaps he, too, was mocking her, playing on her full heart, her heedless generosity, her hungry soul, her love. There was none of her small poses and airs about her now, but the Celt's romance stirred in him at some wild beauty in her. When he had bound her arm she quivered, and he had a sense she was about to leap from him like a creature of the woods at the chance of freedom. Then she turned to him.

"She fooled me; and I'm going away."

"Fooled you?"

"*His* mother. And I said I'd give him up to her, but now I see she only fooled me. I hate them now—and him, too!"

"Aurelie!" Mr. Curran was bewildered. "I never knew of this affair—you and Harlan. It's astounding"—he rubbed his forehead—"impossible!"

"You think so, too?" she blurted. "All right. I'm a fool, I guess. But I'll show 'em." She came directly to him. "Oh, Mr. Curran, I want to go away! I told 'em I'd give up this prize thing, if *he* wanted me to. But now it's different. Mr. Curran, I want to be *somebody!*"

She was staring at him in the moonlight. Mr. Curran could not stand that; his own vagabond heart throbbed mightily. He, too, was the exile, the outlander. To be somebody! Right then and there, Mr. Curran knew he would lead any forlorn hope for her, for any one who wanted to be somebody.

"You *are!*" he cried. "And you can go away, too, and show 'em!"

Her white face stirred a bit. Then, with the direct simplicity of her down-river years, she muttered: "Mr. Curran, I could just love you. I never would have been a beautiful girl if it hadn't been for you!"

Mr. Curran sat down and rubbed the bald spot on his head. He was a man who had walked alone and known the sorrow of evil. He put a kindly hand to her shoulder. He was trying to believe he had a great fatherly pity for her.

"Now, little girl," he said, "let's walk the trail home. It's beautiful—we can see the river in a moment—there! The Mississippi! 'Way off there you came from, didn't you? I lived there once, Aurelie. I left a bit of my heart there among your people. You're something of a savage, and you'll never get rid of what the wilderness put in you—never, never—God bless you! People will never understand, but I do!"

She sighed. "I wish you'd take me away, Mr. Curran—and let me do something. Just like Uncle Mich said: 'To occupy the land!'"

"You shall!" he cried riotously. "Why, what a chance you've got, Aurelie! You're the little rebel done come up the river to occupy the land! You must come to the office to-morrow, for two men are coming from Chicago to see you. The Sunday editor of the *Chronicle,* and an artist to draw you. And the *Chronicle* will give you a prize. One hundred dollars. It's not much. It's all an advertising scheme with the *Chronicle,* of course, but for you—Aurelie, you'll be

rich and famous one of these days, just see if you're not!"

She rubbed the bloody little bandage on her wrist and stared over the town. "I just *will!* And I just love you, Mr. Curran! You're all the friend I got!"

Mr. Curran gasped again. "I sure will help you, Aurelie. This old town's got no use for either of us. We're the insurgents!" And he took her hand gaily on the path and danced her along until, to her set pale lips, a smile had to come. And after it a sob; and then the smile again!

When Mr. Curran left her at Lindstrom's fence he went back in a dream to his old print-shop. He lighted the gas and took his pipe, filled it, sat down and drew aimlessly on it half an hour before he discovered it was not burning.

"Wasting my life," he muttered, "wasting my life! By jove, that little girl's got me going! I'm going to wake up and do something, too!"

He did. He fumbled around until he found a match.

The most beautiful girl perhaps in all America! Could the sentimental Mr. Curran sleep after that? His hair was thin and he had swung the circle and come back to the prosy old town, but no matter! He took a photograph out of his desk a dozen times to study it. Some careless miracle of an obscure country studio had caught an arch stateliness, a breathing grace, a spiritual purity that made the town gasp when it saw the thing—gasp, and then declare it could not possibly be the bootlegger's girl. Mr. Curran groped for the entrancement; yes, it was she—he had seen her face so in the moonlight.

"The dear kid," he murmured, and kissed the picture and laid it away.

Aurelie went about the next morning in a dream. She helped Mrs. Lindstrom with the breakfast dishes and then carried the baby out on the sunshine of the porch to play with him. Neighbor women came and went. Already they were discussing her, she knew. The household had been in a hubbub, she the calmest of them all—Old Michigan's astounded questions, John's suspicious fanaticism, the wife's silly comments, the boys' puzzled awe.

Aurelie a-going to have her picture in the paper!

Well, it was like Aurelie. To Knute and Peter she was ever the princess off on amazing adventures, a fairy who played with them and yet was not of them. From the porch she watched them milking a lean-hipped heifer which they had aroused, standing with their bare feet in the steam of her bed to avoid the frosty grass. Knute shivered in his cotton shirt; above the singsong of the milking his chattering voice retorted to Peter:

"Aw, Aurelie, she ain't a-goin' to get stuck up! She'll come out and go rabbit huntin' with us fellers even if she does get her picture in the paper!"

Later she went past them in the yard, dressed in her best gown, a cheap fantastic circlet of brass in her hair which Uncle Michigan had given her years ago. She rarely wore a hat, for she had none to her pride. The boys yelled their friendly derision at her finery. From the porch Mrs. Lindstrom whined her fright. She was "clean upset" by Aurelie's fortune. But maybe it meant a job. "Lord knows we need it. John laid

up with his arm and Albert not workin' steady. Maybe Aurelie would get a job in the *News* office, but Lord knows what would happen to a girl who got her name in the paper." She sniffled on to the neighbor woman, and Aurelie marched on with vast pride. Not all the beauty of the October sun level from the hills against the filigree of red and gold hung against the cliff face could stir this beaten labor woman of the cities. "Lord knows Aurelie'll get us all in the papers. Ain't my man had enough hard luck without this?"

Aurelie went on, a slender scarlet figure on the leaf-carpeted creek road. She wilfully passed the bridge to cross Sinsinawa on the mossy stones among the rushing water. A red squirrel scolded her from the willows, and she charged him laughingly, her breath quick in the keen air, her eyes bright with delightful freedom. And while the squirrel barked his indignation from a safe tree, she laughed again, and then suddenly remembered that she was trying to be miserable, and yet rebelling against it with all her pride.

When she came to the neat houses of High Street the eyes of early housewives, airing their rugs, caught her gipsy figure; they whispered to the household, and noses flattened against the panes to watch her pass. Already, despite Mr. Curran's effort to hold the story for the Sunday papers, the town was buzzing with Aurelie Lindstrom's notoriety. It was aghast, it was incredulous; but when she passed it ran to see and whispered. When she neared the Square and passed a shop where the cheerful anvils rang, she was conscious that the work stopped and the smiths came out of the blue haze in their leather aprons to stare after

her; and when a farm wagon came along, heaped with frosted corn, the hired man hailed her; and when she passed the Hub Clothing Store, a dapper clerk called: "Hello, Aurelie!" And all the other clerks and the proprietor gathered open-mouthed, to whisper.

She set her shoulders straighter and marched on into the *News* office. The editor arose hastily and stared at her. Then he sighed and came to her with his hand out. "Aurelie, I see it *now!*"

"What?" she asked innocently.

"The beauty winner! Oh, we're a lot of chumps around this old town! Here you grew up among us and nobody ever suspected. You're the most beautiful girl I ever saw!"

She sat down perplexedly. Jim Mims, the tramp printer, toothless and whisky-soaked, grinned at her over his case. Aleck, the press boy, stopped his work. Rube Van Hart, the broken-down ball-player, stuffing old papers into the stove, lifted his derby awkwardly: "Morning, Aurelie!"

All the world seemed radiant with friendliness! The editor had her hand and refused to drop it. His eyes were bright with eagerness.

"Right here in my old shop," he said, "is Cinderella!"

She looked seriously at him. She had never known anybody like Wiley T. Curran. He seemed like a man who had produced a miracle when he merely meant to knock out his pipe. There it was, the sparks flew, and the fairy stood on tiptoes smiling at him! An Irishman had to believe in them.

"Miss Cinderella," went on Curran, "there come the

Chronicle men now from the Parsons House. Those people sent Max Jerome down to sketch you—the top-notch illustrator in the business."

She had never heard of him. Two men came in: one fat, short, busy-looking; the other a lanky youth who laid down a flat case of card papers and turned a good-humored ironical face directly on her.

"And you're Aurelie Lindstrom," he said. "Well, well!"

The stout little man took her hand warmly at Curran's introduction. "The *Chronicle* wants to congratulate you, Miss Lindstrom. It's great! Curran, here, has been telling about you"—he looked flustered for a minute—"and it's great stuff! But we don't want these state papers to get in on this until we spread on it Sunday—understand! Don't let 'em get your picture, or buzz you. And we got to make that eleven-twenty train from the Junction"—he looked at his watch—"and Max wants to sketch you. We're going to run a three-color border on the sup that's a pippin. Wait till you see that Carmen effect of yours in the *Chronicle* layout. It's going to make 'em sit up."

She didn't understand a word of it. She looked appealingly at Mr. Curran. Then she was conscious that Max, the artist, was sketching her swiftly, silently, glancing first at her and then at the light in the *News'* dingy windows and then at his board.

"Say," went on the assistant Sunday editor, "I'm mighty glad you got it, Miss Lindstrom. You see the *Chronicle* contest was straight—it was no frame-up for one of these show girls, who are always butting in on these things. I tell you I never was so pleased at

"Do you know, you interest me more than anything I've done since I did some girls in Algiers."

anything as to find you didn't know a thing about it!"

"Not a blamed thing!" cried Mr. Curran, "till I told her! Why, I even forgot I ever sent those pictures in. The most beautiful woman—" He stared at her, and then broke off mournfully: "Say, Dickinson, the grocer, telephoned in this morning with an awful roar. Pulled his advertising out of the *News* and stopped the paper, because I sent in *his* girl's picture! And she didn't get a look-in!"

The Sunday editor chuckled. Max smiled ironically. He came to Aurelie with a deft firm touch of his white fingers. "A little more to the light, Miss Lindstrom. Just that—there." He stopped thoughtfully and looked down again. "Your hair—you couldn't have it done better on Michigan Avenue. Some women can, you know, and some can't—some can't even buy it." He went back to his sketches. "There's a curious trick about you—" he began to work, and then stopped and laid down his pencil.

"What's the matter, Max?" grunted the newspaper man.

Max was watching her strangely. He muttered; then he said, without regard to his companion: "Miss Lindstrom, do you know you interest me more than anything I've done since I did some girls in Algiers. You—there's a bit of the Orient about you—or Mexico."

"I'm a Creole, I think," she said pensively. "That's what Uncle Michigan said."

The two Chicago men exchanged glances. "Oh, yes," the editor put in—"Curran was saying. Your story—romantic, Miss Lindstrom. I've seen girls like you on

Royal Street. Not many, but once in a while a Creole with a beautiful face. But your story, Miss Lindstrom—great stuff—we're going to flash it big." He looked at his watch busily. "Max, you better kick in hard—"

And in the silence she discovered again that the artist had stopped to watch her and his ironical smile was gone. Presently she heard him mutter and resume work, but ever and again he stopped to study her dreamily.

"Got Max going," drawled the Sunday editor, "and they don't pass bad ones on Max. And the chaps who picked your picture, Miss Lindstrom, out of all that bunch—thousands and thousands of 'em—why, they're no slouches either. There was Pixley of the Art Institute, and Martineau who has charge of the Philadelphia collection, and Benny Booth, who does that girl stuff for the syndicate. Three guys who ought to know. And they picked *you!*"

She sighed luxuriantly and said nothing. Wiley was aghast at all this complacence. He followed her eyes, which were fixed on the morning peace of the court-house lawn under the maples. Up the bluff she heard the bob-whites calling, and the gleam of a dove's wing came before the window.

The most beautiful woman!

One does not easily grasp it, if one has lived an obscure life of common duties in a gray little world; at times hungry, chilled, hurt with rebuff, undershot with sadness. One may wander the world striving for gain or fame, dig for treasure, grow old, dim-eyed, seeking applause, admiration, love—but here, at once, without

asking, seeking nothing, knowing nothing, the jinnee had come and broken the magic vase at her feet!

She sighed again her luxurious peace. The garrulous Sunday editor's voice came faintly through her dream. "When you come to Chicago the paper will entertain you. The old man himself is crazy about that picture—wants a special wire as to what Max thought of you. When you get some clothes—er—Miss—Miss—"

"Not a bit," retorted Max. "It would be a sin to put anything on her. Look at her! In the door-frame—the maples on the bluff beyond her—the sun on that sumac! That little gown, the circlet in her hair, the flower—good God, girl, did you get yourself up for this?"

She smiled complacently. "They make fun of me," she murmured, and Max growled an unintelligible anathema on Rome, Iowa.

And while she sat there with the eyes of the silent men upon her, a step sounded upon the sidewalk. Harlan came past. Her face grew rigid when he saw her. He appeared about to swing into the *News* office in his old genial fashion to see Wiley. Then he met Aurelie's blank gaze and gazed as blankly at her. She saw his big sensitive nose quiver, he stared furiously at Max and his work, so furiously that she was frightened and tried to speak to him. But her voice failed her, and Harlan, looking now at her, spoke doggedly.

"Aurelie, are you going into *this?*"

"Into *this?*"

"This abominable contest—going to have your picture in and all the stuff printed about you!"

He was mad with despair, it seemed; he almost leaped in the doorway. "You shan't!" he roared.

"Yes, I shall!" She looked fixedly at him. "I just made up my mind. I'm just going in for *everything* and be somebody!"

The young man stared at her. Then he whirled about, looked at her from the sidewalk and went on without answer. And Aurelie turned a pale face back to Max and tried to smile.

"Who," said the Sunday editor, "is that damned fool?"

Wiley mumbled awkwardly. "Judge's son . . . best family. Sort of—well, gone on her."

"Good dope," commented the newspaper man laconically. "Got his picture about your shop? Heart interest, and all that sort of thing—big as a house! Get us a come-on story to follow Thursday."

Aurelie stared at him. Then she jumped down and walked before the Sunday sup man and shook her fist under his nose. "His picture in the paper? If you ever do that, I'll go to Chicago and tear up every paper in your old shop!"

And turning around she walked out and up High Street with the air of an empress.

"Well, I'm jiggled!" murmured the Sunday editor. "Help!"

CHAPTER VII

PIGS AND POLITICS

WHEN a man is sixty and has lived well; when he has had money without moiling and honor without envy; has received and amplified to the full a heritage of the best without effort and without price; when youth and maturity have been chastened and molded by that fine, rugged American tradition which began with the founding of Harvard and the Jamestown planters and followed easily the fighting line of pioneers as the frontiers of the republic were lengthened—when one has, indeed, had, righteously and wholesomely, all there is to be had, there is apt to come an arrest of development. There comes a coolness of blood, a reserve of faiths, a caution of more than age and the finer usage. One will discover at least one family of this sort in every small town of the mid West which is of and yet apart from the local aristocracy of the soil-enriched, the banker, the grocer, the lawyer and landholder; a family with an eastern tradition of the best—New England or Virginia—a pretension to the elegance of culture; a group which, while easily the leaders, sits in a state of correct isolation lest their honorable individualism be trampled by the newer needs of newer blood.

The Van Harts, migrating leisurely behind the star

of empire, had beheld afar the dust and shouting; they had been formed by social forces that had run their fire of youth, that New England state of mind of ante-slavery days which had once been the national conscience, but was now vestigial and static. The inpouring of hungrier races to the mid West, who had scratched the bleak prairies, finding the fat and virgin lands now gone; the surge of the political revolts of the trans-Mississippi settlers, time and again from the days of populism to the present; the pathos and the idealism of all this eager building, had not touched them. Their county, one of the Iowa Reserve, had felt faintly the thunder of the awakening; the dingy offices of the Rome court-house had been filled by a group of the "best people" so long that they seemed the hereditament of a class and a leadership.

There were younger men who grew up to feel vaguely the lapse between what was best in the days of their fathers and the needs of to-day. Harlan Van Hart, himself, had discerned curiously the rift between the fine spiritual environ of his father's example and the new, troublous, social conscience. In his debates of high school, his loungings about Wiley Curran's news shop, his friendship with Arne Vance, son of Old Jake, the "political farmer", the county's first insurgent, he had wondered at it. The new movement was no hunger-rebellion of the cities, the mid West was enriched —why, then, the outcry?

Harlan was packing for his departure. He thought rather grimly of the journey East. Elise would be on the train on her way to school, also, and he would have to talk to her. Elise and all the town were curious

with some story concerning him and Aurelie Lindstrom,—nothing definite, but all the more perplexing for that. Harlan had slowly flamed since last night with a resentment new in the genial complacence of his life. When the packing was done he sat by the window where he could see the red and gold filigree of the sugar maples thinly covering the rock face of Eagle Point back of the town. To-day a blue haze enveloped the highest pinnacle. Somewhere, out of this lazy freedom, a cow-bell tinkled. It was Saturday, and he knew the boys were gathering wild crab-apples up along Sinsinawa in the hills and routing rabbits out of the fence corners. He felt immeasurably old some way, and out of all this kindly prosiness. He had an inclination to climb to the hills and then checked it with a bitter refusal—the hills and all this autumn glory were a part of *her* and the inextricable confusion of wrong and right, duty and honor, into which he was plunged. He was angered at his mother; he was enraged at Aurelie. He had asked her to give up this silly business of her prize-winning, and she had sturdily refused at the last. His mother, his class, his tradition, career, Harvard and the law—all had to do with his intolerable sense of rebellion and defeat. Something was inevitably wrong, perhaps with himself. Perhaps, he did not even love Aurelie so much—it was summer madness as his mother had said; but he felt a shame that he would allow this. A man, he told himself, would smash his way through to win, if he greatly desired; but he was a Van Hart and they were not given to that sort of thing. They would coolly consider a great many things before they struck a blow.

He had intended to go down to the drug-store corner where the fellows usually met to smoke and chaff and grind out airs on Playter's phonograph, while groups of girls came in from school or shopping to buy sodas. He would meet them all in the frank comradeship of the town's way, walk home with one, or loiter at the high-school football practise. There were any number of ways to spend one's last afternoon in the old town where one was so pleasantly a favored son. His father was at court and his mother at her club. But he had a curious disinclination to idle around the Square. He took a notion to dress for dinner, although there were to be no guests. His father did so occasionally in their home life; it was understood by the Van Harts as an assertion of old and real standards. There were but nine families in Rome who even dined at night, and these nine definitely fixed the social life. People who dine at six do not dine in shirt-sleeves.

Harlan was going to dress for the last home dinner. It would divert him from his inexplicable dissatisfaction, perhaps. He looked about his room at the trophies of his undergraduate days—banners, dance programs, favors, his tennis rackets, fraternity parchments—hung as he had cherished them. Now he felt an intolerance of this sophomoric display. He promised that when he came back next fall all this truck should go to the garret. It should be a man's room, for to-day he felt no more the boy. He would be the man; something had come to him in his bitterness, his first bewilderment, that told him he must be a man now, and not the lovesick youth, or the trifler with all this easy popularity he had among all sorts of people.

He recalled curiously now how his mother had always contrived that he spend his time with the right sort of people; how he was so thoroughly of the gracious life of this kind of people. East or West, somehow, these best homes opened to him; everything good came without effort, without cost. Yet he would have been surprised to believe he was anything else but a democrat—a young man of the easy, full-lived, tolerant American democracy—the sort of fellow who calls on one's daughters, and whom one's daughters marry when he has made enough in the business or become a junior partner of the firm. East or West, he was the same clean clear-minded chap of family and money. To get on in the world meant no particular struggle; merely common sense and industry, and cultivating the right sort of people, and taking easy advantage of the opportunities that one's position gives one. His father was that sort of man exactly. All the county accepted him as a type of the sturdy democratizing citizen; and Harlan looked out on the people reciprocally,—brown, kind, true-hearted people, unconscious, unafraid, unindebted, their wallets filled. He remembered once traveling with Elise Dickinson, and the grocer's daughter had been ashamed of a country uncle who took out a paper shoe-box of lunch and ate fried chicken and pickles on the seat of the coach. Harlan had resented Elise's feeling. He had no country relations, but he felt a stout kinship with all this prosy, common, wholesome living. They were his home people, these Midlanders, the best of Americans. Certainly he was a democrat, as his father was, without struggle, without cost, without having to soil his hands at anything, or

assume obligation. If one had accused him of class-consciousness he would not have taken one seriously.

His father and mother had no comment when he appeared dressed for dinner. Mrs. Van Hart smiled; it was such a likable following of the judge's habits. The affair of last night had been put by; they had had it out after the party, and Harlan had listened in silence. Their hopes of him, their pride in him; all they had built and lived and dreamed for him—they knew he would not throw it away. He had listened, then he had arisen and said simply: "Mother, I'm going back to school to-morrow. Can't you trust me in this affair—Aurelie Lindstrom—as you can in everything?"

And the mother had answered proudly, "Yes."

To-night at dinner he felt his father's kindly eyes on him; his mother's affectionate welcome was unchanged. The matter was not mentioned again. He knew it would not be. Yes, they trusted him—so loyally, so splendidly, they trusted him! They placed on him the unspoken but inescapable heritage they had received. He would wrong it in no way. Mrs. Van Hart had summed it up to the judge alone last night. "Harlan would not marry an *impossible* girl any more than you would, dear—or your father, or your father's father. It was one of those chivalrous madnesses of youth; and the girl *is* pretty. I was *so* sorry for her! And this ridiculous newspaper prize-winning! It was mercifully fortunate after all. If anything could cut Harlan to the quick it would be cheapness and vulgarity and notoriety. An infatuation might blind him to her social ineptitude—but this beauty-prize absurdity—nothing could have been better to break the boy's

Arcadian romance. Indeed, we got out of it with amusing ease."

The judge had sighed. He had, it seemed, discovered in this son some of the inner steel that the mother possessed clothed in her gracious authority. He had been aware of Harlan's questionings for a year or so in matters that did not come clearly in the mother's view; of a mind grasping with dogged slowness but merciless tenacity at altered standards.

He stopped now to banter his son over the soup, trying to assume their old fraternity of common views. What did Harlan expect to live on next year when he hung his shingle out?

"Perhaps I'll follow Billy Lee's example," badgered Harlan. "Specialize in irrigation law and go out to Arizona and hustle."

The mother smiled at this gay dissembling. A Van Hart having to "hustle" was unthinkable. The judge went on: "By sleeping on the office couch and taking your meals at the Gem—Chicago style—as it advertises—you can probably pull through and pay for your gas and janitor."

"I'm going to give Harlan his first case." Mrs. Van Hart smiled. "He can go before the county board and argue for the Sinsinawa Creek diversion. Taylor says we could sell our north eighty if the creek was dammed above the quarry."

"Mother, that's a matter of politics and not law."

The judge looked curiously at the son. The assurance of a man was in him. Harlan went on: "There's a lot of grumbling over the road contracts Tanner gets out of the board with Dan Boydston chairman. And

now the farmers are saying that the county is going to spend thousands of dollars to divert the creek just at the point where it won't do anybody any good except Tanner and Cal Rice and Dickinson and—well—us, you know."

"The farmers?" the judge's gentle interrogation came.

"Old Jake Vance was saying. And Wiley—"

His father frowned. The mother's amused smile came. The *News* editor was an "impossible person" who was to be seen carrying his exchanges from the post-office, in shirt-sleeves and a derby hat much too small for his head.

"Wiley says it's a great scheme of Thad's to get the county to protect his property from the spring floods and the county pays *him* for doing it!"

The judge was plainly annoyed.

"Your friend, Wiley Curran, seems the self-appointed watch-dog of county affairs."

"He and Mr. Tanner are always after each other. But that's why I said the creek diversion will be a matter of politics. There's sure to be a howl raised about it, dad."

The judge selected a cigar. The mother nodded covertly to him.

"Harlan, dear, you admit the creek ought to be diverted?"

"Why, yes. And it'll be a good thing for us, mother. It'll put all our north tract on the market drained."

The judge's frown came again. "That has nothing to do with it, my boy. The natural bed of the creek is down the old Pocket where those squatters' shanties

are. The quarry gang beyond Lindstrom's—" He paused, for he had not intended to advert to the name —Lindstrom, the discard, he had sent to jail; Aurelie's foster-father.

There was a silence. Harlan looked up to see his father's eyes averted. He had an idea the judge was suffering. His mother shrugged. "My dear, the Pocket is no man's land—the river made it years ago, and it's the natural bed of the creek. Those people haven't a sign of title!"

"I know," the son retorted. "Wiley told me."

"I wish, my boy, you didn't get so much of your knowledge of county affairs through Mr. Curran!" The judge watched him curiously. "Did you see his scandalous editorial on the supreme court's decision in the labor injunction case?"

"Yes. That labor organizer from Earlville, McBride—got Wiley excited about it. It would smash the union movement, Wiley said."

The judge sighed. For the first time he had seen a flash of Harlan's old cheerful eagerness—and it took Wiley Curran's insurgency to bring it. "This man, McBride, is organizing the soft coal miners on the upper creek—all those foreigners that were brought in there. And he denounced Congressman Hall last Sunday at the Earlville Turn Verein meeting, I hear."

"They're after Hall, father—hard. Old Jake Vance says that Wiley Curran ought to run against him—he says the governor's crowd will get behind any one to beat Hall."

The judge laughed. "Wiley Curran in congress? Harlan, I saw him last week down on his knees dig-

ging up geraniums for that funny old lady who keeps house for him—they were throwing cupfuls of earth at each other and shouting like children!"

Harlan smiled. "I suppose! But, dad, this political move is getting big. Jake Vance says it's the young men's movement. Look at the chaps like his boy, Arne, who's come back from the agricultural school chuck-a-block with what he calls the Wisconsin idea. And see how Governor Delroy won on it—he's the young men's governor."

"The state," retorted the judge dryly, "is in an uproar over nothing. When this Wisconsin senator got up to speak at the last session the solid and representative men simply would not listen—he talked to their empty seats. A demagogue, a disturber—and as for Jake Vance, he has been the county's original malcontent since granger days and Greenbackism."

The young man listened quietly. "Father, his son is different. You ought to see how earnest he is. A student-farmer come back from Wisconsin whooping it up for the initiative and recall, and direct elections, out in his father's locality among the old mossbacks—and showing 'em how to raise better corn than they ever did before! Pigs and politics—Arne says!"

"I," smiled the judge, "am still for the Constitution—and my boy, I'm glad you went to Harvard instead of our western colleges. If you're going into politics—" he grimaced, for politics was distasteful to him, and yet Harlan had grown up with the consciousness that some day he should enter politics. His mother's ancestry of Virginia had given it to him as the milk he drew. It had been the one grievance of

her married life that the judge had not cared for a more militant public life. She had an old-fashioned ideal for her boy's future—she was not sure of it all, but it was to be a career honoring the state, reaching up, perhaps, well—one could never tell how far such a son might go, one who had the best of East and West in him. Despite their tradition the Van Harts felt the Midlands to be the heart and soul of the republic, the seat of power and inspiration. Loyal to every inch of the Atlantic seaboard, they knew the mighty valley would home the millions of the best Americans, here would be the breed of the soil, the determining economism, the building and enduring individualism.

The mother glanced brightly at him. "Of course Harlan's going into politics! And he'll never have the struggle that Billy Lee will have. Here, among his own people—" she dreamed an instant, her eyes going out to the encircling hills—"Harlan, dear—there's no limit to what I see for you. Oh, we want you to go on, boy—always on to the best and highest!" She arose in her eagerness and came to him, parted the fair hair from his brow and kissed him. "Dear boy, won't you thank us a little bit—down in your heart—for *saving* you!"

He was still. But his arm stole about her slender waist. Her smooth cheek under the silvery hair, which had a girlish trick of coming down before her ears, was against his own. After all she was "the best of mothers," as he had told Aurelie. Always about him this gracious care, this ennobling presence, this exalting standard of life. Always this warm, serene, home-guarding—all that was best.

He kissed her in their old comradeship of mother and son between whom nothing could come. "Mother, dear—" he answered slowly, "I know! Oh, it's been a battle, but I know!" And he looked up to see now his father's patient eyes shining upon them. Yes, they had lived only for him—they lived for him now.

When he went out later, they watched him swing across the lawn and down High Street in the unbroken spirit of youth, a noble sunniness, a clear freedom about him. They had given him to the land, the best that the land could offer. They watched him go in a pride that was a gratefulness to God.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAMP OF THE YOUNG MEN

MR. CURRAN was in his office working on a rush job for the Gem Restaurant whose illumination across the Square, "Home Cooking—Chicago Style," was in his eyes as he kicked the old press treadle, when Harlan came in. Harlan had not intended to see Wiley again, so deep was his hurt and humiliation, but when he crossed the Square and heard the clankety-clank of the *News* job department, he could not resist old faiths and ardors. Wiley, too, would be hurt if Harlan departed without a word. So it seemed the most natural thing to lounge in, sink down in the editor's chair, while the editor held up his inky hands a minute to wave them cheerily.

And always it was something like this: "Hello, Harlan!"

"Hello, Wiley!"

"Were you down at the Junction for the seven-ten this evening?"

"Yes."

"Who came in?"

"Old Lady Hicks and that Sheasby girl—from Ottumwa, Billy said."

"Hash 'em up for the local. Give Old Lady Hicks a

real snifter—her subscription is about out and I want a renewal."

So Harlan reached for some copy paper and scrawled the items, and looked over the stuff on the local hook.

"'News Notes' will be rotten this week. The brakeman on Ten said his wife had a baby."

"Shove it in."

"I don't know his name."

"Shove it in anyhow. Splash it on thick—jolly him about the cigars and Number Ten, and let folks guess who it is."

So Harlan scrawled on while the editor rehearsed all the news he could think of. "Tear up some editorial dope—local option. Saloon must be kept from our midst. . . . Home and Fireside. . . . Remember Our Boys. . . . Outlaw the Unholy Traffic. . . . " murmured Wiley above the clankety-clank.

Now, Mr. Curran had no boys, and the unholy traffic had piled beer bottles so high behind the *News* fence that wagons could barely pass; and his Home and Fireside consisted of one rotund old lady who had followed his haphazard fortunes from Puget Sound to the Rio Grande and back to the old town, but nevertheless, Harlan patiently denounced the traffic for a stickful.

"There'll be," mused the editor, "Banbury tarts and coffee in a minute when Aunt Abby comes from prayer-meeting. Arne and Janet will drop in—it'll be a farewell spree for you, old boy. I'm glad we had you last, after all."

This was rare comforting. Harlan had wanted to be distant to Wiley, but one couldn't. Even Aunt

Abby couldn't, and she ought to know his worst. He was a man, like many a bachelor, who sought the mothering stimulus of elder women. He was his gayest and his best with them. Aunt Abby had followed all the later years of his wandering; had homesteaded with him under the gray low-hanging skies of the Dakota winters; she remembered the ceaseless winds and sands of Nevada where he had prospected, and the dim buttes of the Southwest where they had slept under the stars in lonely cow camps. Always she had saved him from sheer vagabondia, given the respectability of motherhood to his vagaries, defended him against town gossip; was proud of him against all the world. "That limb, Wiley T." he was to her lonely need of love.

"Janet," mused Wiley, "and Arne—and you—that's about all there's been to the old town for me. It's been lonely here, Harlan—and I'm a bit gray around the temples. You three have made the town more green and fair and livable."

His eye had an unwonted sparkle to-day as he worked. Presently a smart team drew to the door, and by way of welcome, with his hail, the editor hurled a begrimed newspaper directory at the newcomer's feet. A tall, swarthy-cheeked young man with the air of the fields upon him, followed Miss Vance into the shop. The woman superintendent of schools listened to her brother's exuberant chaffing of the others for a moment; she seemed mentally taking stock of the place—Curran wiping his hands on an empurpled towel, Harlan impaling copy on the hook; the general ne'er-do-well atmosphere of the Rome, Iowa, *News*.

"Tarts," said the editor, "and coffee. Maybe beer.

Who likes beer? Nobody. It's unlawful. But there's a case under Aunt Abby's bed, and the good old lady, all unsuspecting, is at prayer-meeting."

"We've dined," rejoined Miss Vance, "keep on with your work."

Mr. Curran was noted for his pretexts to evade work,—which explained a deal about the *News'* circulation. Miss Vance sat down in the swivel chair at the editor's desk which Harlan had vacated. She was tailored far beyond Rome's possibilities even if Sarah Coyne, the dressmaker, had, since a recent trip to Chicago, changed the legend on her shop-window to "Modiste". Tailored and groomed, thirty, aggressive, keen, reserved—the county said it was not for nothing she was daughter of Jake Vance, the political farmer. Janet was accredited to be the most effective campaigner in the court-house; she had been elected to her second term by a splendid majority after having carried her first election to the courts. The old-line party men had not wanted her, but they had had to accept a woman school superintendent. She looked Harlan over with critical interest; Mrs. Van Hart and High Street had not given her much support.

Arne was poking among Wiley's exchanges, snorting militantly now and then. He was on his way back to the agricultural school in Wisconsin, where he absorbed as much radical politics as soil culture. Out of his pockets now bulged a great yellow ear of prize corn and a bundle of congressional speeches. Jake Vance, arguing about the Square on market days in his old, moth-eaten, buffalo coat, expounding his heresies to the farmers, was proud of his two children. Country-

bred, there was no "hayseed" about them. Out at Cloverland farm they had a telephone, a piano player, a motor that did nearly everything about the house and stables, and all the newfangled devices; and the doubting farmers always stopped to see what next the Vances were up to.

"While we're all here," put in Wiley, "let's talk over the Christmas number of our magazine so's we can get it out by April. It's really due to our subscriber."

Miss Vance looked at him. "Wiley," she said decisively, "I'm going to sell *The Inland Empire.*"

Mr. Curran feigned distress and amazement. "Sell it? Why, you can't—I'm president!

"Besides," he went on riotously, "we've got a new subscriber. I was afraid our other one would die. The Gem—Chicago Style. Since Sallie Frisby came back from the city she says it's a shame this town has no place where one can go after the *theater,* so she's going to keep the Gem open until ten o'clock if there's not a soul in the place. She's going to give Rome a touch of high life, and on that aspiration I got her to subscribe to *The Inland Empire*—if we give her a write-up. Also, we take it out in trade. By jove, I jumped at it—*The Inland Empire* does need a square meal!"

Miss Vance looked at him in some despair. "Nevertheless, we're going to sell the magazine—to a Des Moines chap who wants to turn it into a farm journal."

Mr. Curran looked doleful. It is true he was president of the corporation, but most of Miss Vance's salary had gone of late to get *The Inland Empire* out of the Earlville print-shop. Wiley had long since ex-

hausted his eloquence and his credit. Mr. Curran's touch seemed as irresponsibly fatal to this grand scheme as it had to the *News'* circulation. Janet had had great dreams of *The Empire.* She had wanted expression and achievement beyond the routine of her work; she had thought to touch the world, its letters, crafts, movements with her own convictions; they would build their magazine slowly to success, aspiring high but yet keeping to the good earth, with departments for the home, the farm and countryside, while battling for the militant political ideals of the West. It would mean the sweetness of power and freedom—now she wondered how her own practical mind could ever have supposed it would succeed with Mr. Curran at its business head.

"Wiley," she said severely, "I shall sell it."

"You had better," he murmured again dismally, "consult our stockholders."

Arne and Harlan shouted irrepressibly. "Go ahead," cried Harlan. "I'll donate mine. I'm too busy this year to furnish any more 'Boston Notes', and the athletic résumé, anyway. I move we go down to the Gem, eat out that dollar subscription and then suspend publication at once."

"Harlan," retorted the superintendent, "Wiley is demoralizing you. I'm glad you're going back to Harvard."

Her brother looked with some frank resentment on the immaculate young man. The lean-faced student-farmer from Wisconsin had the dyspeptic diathesis of the reformer. The genial ease of breeding in the judge's son galled him at times, even as did Curran's

whimsical impracticality. Arne's black eyes went about the old shop with impatient envy, the old Washington press, the stack of frayed ink rollers, the high wooden cases of type stained and whittled by generations of wandering printers; the ramshackly desk piled with yellowing and dusty papers, gummy with paste and inky accretions except in the one spot where the editor was wont to push everything aside to find a writing space—the student-farmer, burning with his fiery zeal, saw in it all power—power unused, dissipated, perverted. He was forever urging Wiley to further radicalism; and Wiley at his best was irresponsible enough. The Vances and the *News* had been united from the first by common sentiment; from this same old desk, Jake Vance in war-time days had lifted the body of the elder Curran, helpless with a copperhead bullet, and defied the mob; and in the years of the granger movements the *News* had supported Vance in repeated hopeless battles for congress. Arne had grown up in this demagogic ferment of vast ideas; he had come back from his "cow college" quick with a sense of revolt, an impatience to hurry his conservative county of the Reserve into the "young men's movement" of the party.

"Harvard," he growled, and then, conscious of his intolerance, added: "Oh, well—that's all right. Harlan'll drop all that Bostonese accent when he gets back to practise here a year or two. And he'll be with us on the band wagon when we get this county organized to dump the old gang. He'll forget he's Judge Van Hart's son, and a nephew of Senator Fairchild and a—a Geek!"

Again they smiled at Arne's heat. He and Harlan had played on the same football team in high school, and the lean farm boy had been the sensation of the state athletic association. But though one may rip up the invading lines and score the championship touchdowns and be borne from the field smothering in ribbons and have to face, tongue-tied, the clapping of all the pretty hands in school at the annual association banquet, yet when all's said and done, to be a "Geek" and call on all those girls who flutter summer evenings in and out of the Van Hart gate is a much greater thing. Which is reasonable and proper and according to the light of the Best People in many places East and West other than Rome, Iowa.

"Oh, Harlan's all right," repeated Arne, "and so are these other people along High Street. So is that copper Indian over on the Square—he's marking the spot where something *once* happened. In Earlville they're laughing at our row over Sin Creek. Every time a freshet comes, what happens? Some of our prominent citizens wake up in the morning and find their lawns strewn with drowned socks and busted stovepipes and brass collar buttons that Sin Creek has swept down on us from the garbage heaps of Earlville. Then they roar and talk creek diversion, but nothing was ever done until they made it a county steal with Old Thad Tanner getting the rake-off. Then, being *regular,* the best families agreed to it."

Sinsinawa had been a scandal immemorially, everybody knew. But then everybody loved Sinsinawa, and Rome without the wanton singing down a dozen channels from the bluff would not have been Rome. One

could put up with a vulgar collar button washed down now and then from the alleys of Earlville.

Wiley Curran sighed as he watched the copper Indian across the Square, Chief Winnesaqua, who ruled the land when squirrels gamboled over the site of Rome. They were still gamboling over the old town, while Earlville had built its Hotel Metropole with English steeplechase scenes around the dining-room wainscot. Rome had had Miss Amelia Parsons of the Parsons House, and her one o'clock Sunday dinner, with chicken, since 1856. Earlville had its Elk's club done with a brownstone front. Rome had its Shakespeare club which met Thursdays at the ladies' homes. Earlville had its syndicate theater in cream brick; Rome had its opera-house sheathed in tin imitation of sandstone —and peeling off. Earlville—but why rehearse? There is the Carnegie library, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Federal building, the paid fire department, the interurban, the home of Congressman Hall, which, like all the homes of great men in the West, was spiked with the militant decoration of a German cake—the east addition, and the factory district.

Rome had none of these. In lieu of town plats it had an imperial isolation. When the Earlville boosters, in train, went up the valley, to serenade other communities and parade in silk hats and white flannel trousers, Rome was usually entertaining district delegates to the Baptist Young People's Association; and when a girl "show" struck Earlville direct from two hundred nights in Chicago, Rome's tin opera-house was invariably given over to Flint, the Hypnotist, the Swiss Bell Ringers, or the Chautauqua Quartette.

Mr. Curran accepted tickets to these on advertising, and sat gloomily all through. After all, Mr. Curran was a loyal citizen. Even though he did print the story of the drummer who related that Miss Amelia Parsons of the Parsons House insisted on his sleeping with brown papers under his ears, lest the pillows become soiled too soon after the Saturday change.

Of course he lost advertising. But Mr. Curran had an unhappy mania for printing things that lost advertising. Even now, Miss Vance, looking with patient eyes at the three—Harlan, fair-skinned, resolute, serious, his large-boned frame carrying, at twenty-one, a man's dignity; her brother Arne, soil-burned, Indian-cheeked, nervous, lean, a Lincolnian awkwardness about his clothes; and then Wiley with his young-old eyes, the close brown beard lending him, in Rome, an inescapable foreign air—felt Mr. Curran's perennial failure.

At eighteen, when she taught her first school, she supposed that Wiley would ask her to marry him, but he had gone off on footless wanderings. Twelve years later he came back, a trifle stouter, a bit sad, still mischievous, the many-sided friend, but not the lover. She had gone on to a successful and widening career; she had developed a personality, made a place; but Wiley—well, Wiley had become "Curran of the *News*." Even now Harlan Van Hart, many years the younger, was fitting himself for his father's honored footsteps; Arne was enthusiastically putting in his great schemes for soil-sweetening, lecturing to farmers' institutes, and dabbling in county politics; but Wiley had marked time.

She was too sane, too finely schooled to linger over sentimental regrets because of Wiley or herself. Only, as a wife, and a wife of a man of affairs, she saw one path to the larger life she longed for. She had the instinctive political predilections of her family; the man she should marry must bulk up with the county men at least. Arne, back from his eager drinking of economic revolt at the most radical college of the West, was already listened to, but Wiley's paper—well, it was only the *News* barking away as it had done since abolition days! The county was used to that.

Yet Janet had a peculiar sense of his closeness to all that prosy life of the countryside. Never a losing grievance of the farmers for which the *News* did not contend; never a day but what, in and out of the shabby old shop, some shy countryman did not stray to relate the district news, to ask a favor or confirm some rumor. Curran had inherited all this, and curiously, with all his dilettante indrawing and worldly sophistication, had delighted in it. In her drivings to lonely districts on school visits the lady superintendent found this insistent interest: "The *News* editor," what was he doing or saying?

When she related this, Curran had laughed carelessly; just as he laughed when Janet had urged him to run for congress; just as he had laughed, running his blued fingers ruefully through his hair, when she asked of his plans for the abortive *Inland Empire*. Miss Vance, in the case of Mr. Curran, usually concluded by going on and disregarding him.

"I suppose," he put in now, on Arne's never-ending satire of county affairs, "I'll have to shag along with

the old town alone. You boys off to college, and Janet visiting the district schools. Christmas—who'll be home Christmas?" He appealed to Harlan ingenuously.

"June for me. I'll run down to Washington for Christmas at the senator's."

Wiley slowly considered. Senator Fairchild, cousin of Mrs. Van Hart, one-time cabinet officer, intimate of the president, most powerful figure from the West at Washington. Surely, for a country judge's son, the mere relating of dinner at Fairchild's bespoke a flattering future. Harlan was, indeed, the son of fortune.

But again Arne growled. Fairchild was the red rag in the faces of the state's political rebels; he was one with the gigantic financial interests that dominated his party. Already his reelection was bitterly opposed.

"Eat that dinner, son," roared the farmer-student. "It'll be the last one for that old cuss as a senator! The governor's crowd'll get him! I tell you you fellows ought to get an ear to the ground. Here Wiley sits in his old shop kicking off a four-dollar job for the Gem Restaurant when he ought to be out among the people. Here's Harlan getting through law and then hanging out for some picayune case Old Thad Tanner throws him to keep him lined up with the old guard. In a few years he'll be fat and married, driving a car around town, never a hair sweated and—*respectable!* Oh, lord!"—Arne smote his hard fists together—"never a rough and tumble fight in your life, was there, Harlan?"

Harlan smiled. That sort of thing was not for the Van Harts.

"You ought to come up to Wisconsin instead of go-

ing East. That Harvard graft is all right for law, but you want to catch the new spirit of the new times. Sometime up there in the North, I'd like you to climb the hill with me and see the fellows from the cow college fight to get into Carmack's lectures on political science. I say, *fight* to get in! Carmack's the faculty chap the regents would fire if they dared. But I tell you every man who comes out of the class room is a political missionary against the old order. You ought to hear those young professors talk—that's the stuff for the West!"

Wiley's eyes were on the two. Both native sons of the Midlands, one bronzed with the soil, lean with his ardors; the other healthily pink, the beauty of a Galahad, the pure nurture of his father's Victorian standards—of the two he loved Harlan better. There was about him a completion, he was a product of an American era done; the other was in the travail of the making. But he could visualize all of Arne's outcry. He himself, in the wandering years, had seen the epic of the old West close; he had mingled the wine of his life with it. But now the new land was here, the stately cities rising, the ordered nobleness of form. That was the meaning of the cry and tumult, the fuller democracy; the West had seen and caught the vision; and Curran, the Celtic romanticist, could feel the splendor.

"'You shall seek the truth, and the truth shall make you free;' that is what they tell us up there," went on Arne. "I've lain in bed after bucking all night on soil-tests and economic history, and listened to the young men going up the hill to Carmack's lectures—the young men up the hill in the snow at seven o'clock! And

when he declared that the spirit of socialism was the spirit of every good thing the world was fighting for; when he told them to go out and preach the recall, and the state control of wealth—I've heard them shout, and others going up the hill took up the shout. That's what we're getting, along with soil culture and forest preservation and law and engineering—I tell you it sounds like the march of a new civilization—the tramp of the young men going up the hill."

Harlan listened with his detached and friendly smile. He remembered last week stopping Arne in the post-office with a forecast of the Yale-Harvard football season, but the western student had not seemed to hear —perhaps he was filled with his vision of the young men going up the hill seeking the vision of the New America, the truth that should make men free.

"All those young fellows going back to their states jump into politics," went on Arne. "So am I, Harlan. We're going to stump this county talking pigs and politics, and we'll ditch Jim Hall for congress and Fairchild later. And where will you be—*you,* I say!"

"Arne," drawled Harlan with aggravating calm, "I shall probably be arguing a line-fence case in the justice court."

Arne snorted. "Wiley, here, is going to get in the primaries against Jim Hall."

"Wiley," put in Janet slowly, "last week the governor was asking about Curran of the *News.*"

Wiley flushed, disconcerted for once. He felt that Janet was shrewdly reading him. He had met Governor Delroy once—the fighting anti-ring governor, whom the rebellion of the north insurgents had put in

the chair. But that Delroy remembered *him!* After all, with his philandering old *News,* had he really done something? He raised his eyes to see Janet smiling fondly at him, that old affectionate camaraderie of days long dead. Harlan, too, smiled. It was rather droll to consider this obscure country editor as a contestant against James Hall, one time his father's law partner, now one of the most powerful figures of the lower house. What, then, was Wiley Curran in the new civic conscience of the state? What hidden forces were arrayed against the old order, the easy dominance of property and class to which privilege had given a sort of sanctity? He had his first feeling of class consciousness, now, with these challenging friends. And slowly his thoughts went back to Aurelie, to that sullen resentful shame with which he had become aware of his failure to reconcile his love for her with his sense of obligation to his parents, their tradition, breeding, their love and hopes for him. This seemed deepest in him, this abiding sense of honor to them, to their gentle birth and the manners of their kind. There were two sorts of right, then—the clamor of those who fought up to seize the good of life, and the steadfast resolution of those who possessed this good and would hold it against the others. Nothing new in the problem; it was the problem of democracy. Harlan was considered an amiable and democratic young man, yet he could not define certain reserves in himself and why it was almost impossible to pass these reserves or admit others to them, although they were the common understanding of cultured people everywhere. That was it—this bond of cultured people! And social rebels, polit-

ical rebels; the eternal spirit of rebellion of any sort did not have this, or cared nothing for it—the rough-and-tumble of life left little time for its fineness. That was left to those of the established order, an aristocracy to which, much as he hated the word, he must belong. That was why he could acutely see Aurelie as the little vulgarian, after all; of obscure origin and social gaucherie once she was placed with people of his sort. His sense of orderliness detested any such thing, and so, in his cooler moments, he told himself he did not really love her. She had touched him with the pathos of her love for him, the pathos of her defeated gaiety and courage, the meagerness of her life; that was all, he told himself. He had been sorry for her—yes, that was all. But he wondered at his anguish and his shame that night she ran away from him.

His thoughts came back to his friends in the *News* office. In this dingy shop the sense of social revolt centered; it was not strange that through the *News* Aurelie had come to this abominable notoriety; all the things about Aurelie that would exasperate Harlan, would merely delight the vagabond soul of Wiley Curran. It was no use being angry at Wiley about it; his yellow dog of a paper would merely yelp the louder.

Even now, when Janet Vance and Arne were trying to compel a moment's serious thought in Mr. Curran, the editor was yawning, "*Me*—for congress? And you actually think I am beginning a career? Janet, yesterday I was kicking away at this old job-press when a drummer blew in here and tried to sell me a set of desk stamps. He was one of those ingratiating boosters, and as I had my hat *on* he thought I was about twenty-one.

He set down his case, as I didn't stop work, and began to tell me how much good it did him to see a young man fighting away down here to make a start in life.

"I said, 'Stranger, what you see here is no start in life; it's a finish!'"

Miss Vance did not smile—at first. Then, at Wiley's rueful discomfiture she did. But she said sternly: "Wiley, I'm ashamed of you!"

"So am I, Janet." He crossed his legs over the waste-paper basket and sighed. "But I'm growing up—slowly. I know what Arne means. The tramp-tramp of his northmen—the big-limbed students up the hill. And I see his leaders, too. I know what Delroy is and means. Good God, I gave my life to the West!" He sat forward, his eyes shining. "Only it was its poetry and its epic bigness that got me, not its outcry of conscience, its political idealism. Arne felt that; he brought it back to us here in the South. And I know, Janet! Something at last has stirred me!"

Arne arose and was winding his big silver watch. "Maybe now you'll get a hustle on and change the *News* to a daily."

"The bank turned me down on that dinky loan. And when I tried to get it in Earlville, some mysterious power blocked me there. I know well enough; it's all because of the fight I made to get the town to take the pumping contract away from Thad Tanner and have a municipal plant."

Harlan stirred. His father was a director of the bank. He did not like Wiley's insinuation; but then his father did not like Wiley. He murmured some inconsequential badinage and followed Arne out to where

the student-farmer was bringing his mud-splashed colts to the *News* horse-block.

"I wish," muttered Arne, "you'd get Wiley into this. He's got a chance—such a big chance for the nomination. It's going to be our year—the young men's turn, Harlan. And, old boy, we want you with us!"

Harlan smiled lazily. "Old boy, it's great to see any one so earnest! I don't imagine it's in me. Father hasn't much use for the insurgent idea. And you know our family; the senator is mother's cousin, and Hall was father's law partner."

Arne grimaced. He knew all that! "Your people expect you to be in politics sometime, Harlan, don't they? Well, you want to look *ahead!*"

"The tramp of the young men up the hill!" Harlan quoted good-humoredly. "Well, good-by, old chap; it's *East* for me to-morrow, and *West* for you!" He held out his firm strong hand to Arne's rough one. "Next year I'll have out my shingle above the bank corner, and you'll be experimenting with soils among the farmers, and we'll see!"

Arne smiled back the friendly challenge. "And Wiley—let's help put him over, however things go. I'll be out among the farmers, and you among your sort of people—High Street and all. Janet, there"—his eyes went to the trim blue-gowned figure of his sister sitting forward in the editor's chair—"she's set her heart upon it. Harlan, she's waited all her life for Wiley's awakening!" He appealed in all his boyish ardor to his friend. "Wiley, if he'd have a career—if he'd *do* something, she'd marry him!" Then he added hastily, "Or he'd marry *her!* He'd realize, then, all

she is to him. Wiley's awakening—that's what I'm after—and this is his big chance!"

Harlan nodded. All the county, these many years, had put the names of the erratic editor and the efficient school superintendent together—and in vain. Janet was one of the notable women of the state's educational work. Curran was still "Curran of the *News*."

Curran, this same minute, was badgering Miss Vance about her political proclivities. "I thought," he drawled, "that since you ventured to remark in your address to the county institute, that the constitution of the United States was not, after all, a supernally wise instrument, Boss Tanner and all the old bats about town had concluded that you were unfit to be school superintendent! Old Thad, who, during the war, cleaned up his million on shoddy contracts with the government, roaring for the constitution—ain't it a holy show?"

Miss Vance arose and came to him determinedly, her clean-cut face looking down at him with a humorous impatience. "Just the same, Wiley, any one who wants to get on in politics in this county must reckon with Mr. Tanner. I wish *you'd* know it!"

"It's more fun," responded Mr. Curran, "to insinuate he's a thief."

"But not politics."

"Upon my soul, Janet"—he looked up, curiously—"you women of the day get me. You are so damned successful at this game—tell me how you do it?"

She smiled with some demureness. "If you insinuate I'm a woman politician, very well. I'll tell you some points of *my* game—it's never to let my waist line

lose itself. And investing a deal of my salary in masseurs and hair-dressing instead of political assessments. And getting about casually among the men, and yet never appearing too wise."

"I understand that the school board, which fought you to the last ditch, has removed all the cuspidors from its rooms and shaves twice a week since the woman superintendent was elected! And that the Democrats can't find a man to oppose you. Thad Tanner tried to get young Mills of the Earlville Normal to run against you, didn't he? But Mills didn't run."

Janet put a firm gloved hand on his arm. "Not since I put on my best clothes and went to an Elks' Club Ladies' Night dance purposely to put the notion out of Mr. Mills' mind! It took half my dance program, though!"

Wiley rubbed his hands delightedly. "Lord, Janet—it's genius!"

"No—business. And Wiley—oh, I want you to wake up! Do something! Be with us—the people who *try* something! Oh, Wiley, I want you to!"

That was ever her old fond cry. Ever since their school-days she had tried *something* and that was to make a success of Wiley. Even he, with the trifling blindness of a man, might have known what was behind it all. She went on mournfully: "You said something had stirred you at last, Wiley!"

He was looking past her out the window to Harlan and Arne across the Square. The door was open, and the evening held the first cool stealth of autumn. The breeze upon the gray façades of the rock behind the town showered down the red and yellow leaves. Al-

ready, from the elevation of Curran's shop, one could catch glimpses of the distant river through the denuded cottonwoods of the bottom lands. And his eyes were there with their old detachment of a man who dreams of what he had found and lost out beyond the circling hills; of what the years had given and taken away, and he had stood by empty-handed. But he turned to her with sudden new eagerness.

"Janet, I wonder if it's all as you and Arne say? And McBride, over in Earlville, and Purcell, and these men who have such a curious notion that I can beat Hall in the primaries? And Governor Delroy, he spoke of me?"

"Yes. You know his organization doesn't amount to much down here. It needs local leadership. They want a man out for congress. Assemblyman Barrett, of Dallas County, was considered, but they need him where he is. And all the other progressives are like father—too—well, they've had their fling. The movement wants new men and young men."

"But *me* in congress. It sure would be a treat for congress!"

"Oh, Wiley! Be serious!"

He was still for a long time. Yes, he had been the watcher from afar of the fighting men. He had thought his years of ardor done. He spoke at last very gently.

"Janet, I'm remorsefully humble. You've been my good angel—always, since we were kids in school. Good God, how a man flings his youth away! Eh, I thought that was what I'd done. But Janet, I've awakened—I have!"

Her eyes were sparkling. She tensed with a new

splendid jubilance. She had been the militant; she was of that fine modernity that has given to strong women the fearless vision and the will to do, and has taken nothing from their womanhood. She was alert with the expression of sex, inescapable, undaunted, as free as a man's virile pride. And Curran, with his love for the modern, his hatred of sham, had felt at times, the pulsing of her power and had misunderstood nothing. That was the bond of their intimacy; this knowledge unspoken but unafraid.

"Wiley," she murmured. "You *will* come out? You *will* go in the primaries? Oh, will you? I've waited so long, Wiley! For *you!*"

"I know. And this very week I—I—seemed to see myself aright—to realize what a miserable failure I'd been—a dreamer. Oh, something very wonderful awakened me—quickened me. I'll tell you, Janet, the very first thing!"

She looked curiously at him, but with her bright fond faith, her overflowing happiness. The fine hard lines that the years had schooled about her eyes were gone.

"The very first thing! Oh, but the point is that you've *done* it! We'll work for you—all my friends who've stood by me will be with you. But the first thing—was it *to-day?*"

"No. Last Tuesday. A little thing—such a foolish little thing. But it hit me hard—it appealed to the sentimental in me, I suppose. But you know me—all that sense of romance that's made a beggar of me, Janet! It was Aurelie Lindstrom."

She did not stir; her attentive eyes were on him

merely, but the cool shrewd reading of her workaday life came over the eagerness of a moment ago. "Aurelie?" she murmured—"and her prize-winning?" She smiled slowly. "Why, Wiley, you hardly knew the child!"

"Yes. But the thing hit me, Janet. She came to me"—he hesitated over mentioning Harlan's name in Aurelie's troubled case—"this thing confused her so. And hurt her—it was—sort of a—a—tragedy, Janet. And she left it all to me—what she should do. Here's this great newspaper going to shout all about her next Sunday—you know the stuff—her beauty, and her position and life and prospects—all that sort of thing. I know its cheapness and its silliness, but it's her chance, Janet! She asked me what to do."

"Yes." She watched his ardent eyes.

"I told her to go on, seize all the best in it. She is a grand little girl, someway. You know I've lived South—I know her temperament—I know all she's had to fight, too, out at Lindstrom's. Know and sympathize with—I don't suppose another person in all the town could know or *care!*"

"I don't imagine." Janet knew Wiley Curran. Somehow, if there was a homeless old soldier, or a destitute family in the county, they always came to Wiley's attention—he was ever knowing and caring, helplessly in his penniless struggle with the *News*.

"But you, Wiley—what can you do for her?"

"I don't know. Only befriend her. All the town's laughing over her winning a beauty prize. No one ever noticed her, except she was considered pretty and eccentric. The big fatheads!" he cried breathlessly.

"Does any one suppose *they'd* see that marvelous purity in her face—her grace, and all that odd quality of her mind and soul—"

"Wiley?" Miss Vance sat back, her lips tightened.

"Oh, I know! Scold me—say I can't *afford* it! That it's aroused a lot of heartburnings and jealousies and silly rot in town, and I shouldn't be in it! But she came to me—she said I was almost her only friend in Rome. And with all this notoriety—Aurelie, bewildered, dumbstruck—needs protection—a—friend!"

"You consider yourself a—chaperon?"

"Don't laugh. I tell you she *woke me up!"*

"What possibly could she have to do with your awakening?"

"We had a long talk. A splendid talk, Janet. I saw the hopelessness of her life if she stayed here. There's nothing for her here. And now, who can tell? Why, I'll bet she gets proposals of marriage by the dozen—artists will want to paint her, managers will want her to go on the stage—everything is possible with her! And she left it to me, Janet—and I told her go—seize all the good in life, anyhow, anyway—live, *live!"*

"And you?" Janet pursued pitilessly.

"Ah, well! That little girl—suffering so. And only I know how she is suffering! I told you it fired me. She grew so wide-eyed and big with it, and determined to be *somebody!* And I thought of myself—the years I'd wasted, Janet, and I said to myself: 'God bless you, child! If *you* can, *I* can!' I don't know how it was, but I felt my old fire again—my old ambition! That's why I promised you, Janet, to make this fight."

"Yes," Janet answered slowly. "I'll help you, Wiley."

He could not see her face. She was watching her brother bring the rig across the street. But the splendor seemed to have died for her; in its stead was the old shrewd patience of the successful woman, touched now with pathos for some haunting defeat. "Yes, I'll help you, Wiley," she added and arose to go.

Wiley watched them drive away. At the end of the street the gray of the autumn country began; the lonely land of hill and bottom, but over it the home fires were burning. So they thought something of him out there? Curran of the *News*—the heart in exile, the man without place and honor? They believed in him, the brown-armed quiet men; they had watched his fight, heard his incessant outcry against every wrong, every privilege of class whether in the obscure countryside, or out in the great world? He could not tell. It had seemed as if he spoke alone, championing valiant but hollow theories against their complacent incredulity. He had envied, at times, the prosperous town tradesmen, professional men, the best people—they had not spent their hearts in crying out for new things—and the county had enriched them.

But now out of his long and hidden despair of himself a great vision came; the farm-home lights were beacon fires lighted for an eternal struggle, awaiting the coming leaders. And his heart cried out that he would be one to answer; he understood at last what Arne meant. He heard the Tramp of the Young Men up the Hill.

CHAPTER IX

THE BEAUTY PRIZE

THE following Sunday Rome had its wonder—a specially-written wonder done in three colors on the front page of the Sunday sup. There was a demand for the *Chronicle* at the Junction depot after the one-ten train and at the post-office news stand which sold out every paper and the agents telegraphed to Burlington for more. There was none in Earlville; the two towns forgot their bickerings and gazed—many a Sunday dinner was delayed while they gabbled about Aurelie Lindstrom's picture with its three-color border of cupids and hearts and darts and young men in evening clothes tangled in spiders' webs and all the sort of thing that publishers use to embellish whatever they print about girls.

As Mr. Curran of the *News* often remarked, as he fingered the magazines at the post-office news stand and opened his Sunday paper, the American people were perfectly crazy about girls if their art and literature went for anything. But Rome, Iowa, wasn't. Young men that sunny November Sunday drove their sweethearts out the quarry road, feet on the dashboards, chewing their gum, gazing at Miss Lindstrom's picture, peering furtively at the Lindstrom house, and then drove back no wiser than before. Not a glimpse

of the three-color beauty winner did they get. And on all the buggy rides and walking home from the young people's services it was agreed that she was preposterously overrated. And in all the comments—sarcastic, belittling, cruel—ran the note of inquiry; what would the bootlegger's girl do now?

Aurelie sat in a sort of bewilderment when Knute brought the first Sunday *Chronicle* home. When John came back from church he saw it on the floor and tore the offending picture from the page. Then he ordered her harshly to go to her room, and the girl obeyed. In the chill of the tiny chamber she sat staring at the little silver crucifix hanging over her mirror. Old Michigan crept in after a while, when the buzz of silly neighbor women grew too much for him in the kitchen. He sat on the edge of Aurelie's little white bed and drew her down until her hair was tangled in his shaggy beard.

"Done come up-river," he whispered, "to occupy the land! Reckon so! Don't mind John, my little girl. He's hard with his religion, but he's meanin' well. Law done drove him to his bitterness and exile, and give him hate 'stead of love. But my girl he can't change a hair of your head, or the pink of your pretty cheek!"

And then she cried as Aurelie rarely cried; and crept to the old whisky pedler, and all the afternoon they huddled together to keep warm, while Mrs. Lindstrom's silly chatter to the neighbor women went on, and the boys sat apart in awe as if some tragedy had fallen on them. The gossip of the town went on. The next day young Butts of the *Mercury-Journal* drove from Earlville to interview her and met a gaunt fever-

ish-eyed man who ordered him away, his shotgun lying handily across the rail fence. The correspondent saw two ragged tow-headed children and a lean-hipped cow or two beyond the forlorn shanty and that was all. Beyond was the corn patch, and the other unpainted cottages of the quarrymen, and then the gray bluff with its never-ceasing roar and dust cloud from Thad Tanner's quarry.

Some curious town people tried to call. Lindstrom gave them the same grim welcome. And all the week the town seethed with curiosity. Prim misses read the newspapers more assiduously than ever before; and the *Chronicle* felicitated itself and "spread" with more details of Aurelie's life—incidentally setting loose a horde of canvassers all over the state to work up subscriptions, giving away a half-tone of the beauty winner with each.

"What does it mean?" fulminated the *Chronicle,* "for this little country girl to be announced as the most beautiful woman in the country? In the first place it means admiration, love. That is first in every woman's heart of hearts. Hundreds of thousands of men have gazed on her picture and felt their hearts moved. Thousands have written declaring they adored her. Sincere honest men, some of them laborers, some millionaires, have offered their hands to the modest young beauty. They send references of their social and financial standing, church and lodge connections and prospects. Lawyers offer her positions as stenographer; manufacturers seek to have her demonstrate their goods; she is asked to sing, to lecture, to go on the stage. Ministers write her advice; actresses ask the secret of her beauty;

mothers warn her against the seductions of her fame. Strangers come to the little Iowa farm to gaze on the abode of beauty; the telephone bell is constantly ringing as people call up to congratulate her. She is showered with gifts, honors, invitations, emoluments—so great a thing is it to be declared by the *Chronicle* to be the most beautiful woman in the land."

As Vawter, the artist, the pimply-faced youth who took that luckless picture in his shabby studio up above the Hub Clothing Store, remarked to Mr. Curran: "Oh, Gawd!"

Vawter was peevish because none mentioned that *he* took the photograph. "Here's you and me, Wiley, stirred up all this bunk—and just *think* of 'em sayin' there's a *telephone* down in Old Mich's shack in the bottoms—and we ain't gettin' a cussed thing out of it! We ain't even gotta line in the papers! Why don't you roast 'em?"

Wiley Curran smiled distantly.

"Bunk!" sniffed Vawter, the artist, and went away. "I don't believe any thousand millionaires want to marry Aurelie Lindstrom. Shucks, they's heaps of girls right in high school prettier'n she is. It's my picture that done it and what do *I* git? Fitchered, by swanny!"

And when the artist came on store clerks and traveling men discussing her about the Square, and the strangers asked of the beauty winner, he growled: "Bunk! Don't ask *me!*"

Mowry, the undertaker, who always came into the *News* office to peddle gossip and read the proofs of county board meetings to see if there were not some

indigent dead he could bury, was rasping his shiny serged legs before Mr. Curran's stove and summing up the town's comment.

"Everybody's sore. Folks air goin' to stop them She-cawgo papers. Wimmen's Club says it's demoralizin', and the teachers say it busts up school work. Cal Rice, over to the bank, he says of all the disgustin' things is for the *Chronicle* to git roped in by a French girl this way. And Dickinson, I guess *he's* sore because *his* girl didn't git no prize, and everybody is hollerin'; and here I ain't buried anybody for two months!" He looked across at the Widow Steger's hollyhock walk: "Hey, how's the widder?"

"I understand that Dickinson is going to send her to Burlington for treatment," answered Wiley.

"Just so. And she'll die in hospital! And I been a-buyin' my groceries at Dickinson's for seven years—ever since the widder was *took!* Dog-gone, Wiley—this *is* a sorehead town!"

Old Mowry went out to denounce the grocer and the county board to every farmer along the hitching-rails. He had been county coroner until the story got out that once he fished a nigger out of Broad slough, held an inquest and buried him, and put in his claim for fees. Four days after he discovered another nigger under the ice, held an inquest and buried him—with fees. Three days after, another mysterious nigger was found and buried—with fees. Then the weather unfortunately grew warm, and some one started an investigation. The nigger and the coroner's political career spoiled simultaneously that week. Old Mowry had been shuffling around the court-house trying to

collect his fees from every succeeding county board, but always the ghost of that colored citizen haunted him. And every monthly board meeting Father Doyle drove over from Earlville to see if Mowry's claim had been allowed. Mowry was the sole Catholic in Rome, but the only time he would contribute a cent was when he had buried a Protestant in good standing. And one of the undertaker's grievances, always aired in the *News* office, was that county dead should not figure in the good priest's calculations—he couldn't collect his fees, anyhow, out of this gol-durned board. Mr. Curran listened patiently. The priest was his good friend. So was Mowry. So seemed all the lame ducks of the community—and no one else. He wondered now, in his new-found ambitions, why all the representative men seemed afraid of him; and why all the nondescript humanity of the town attached itself to him. Mowry was the first to spread the news about the court-house that week that Curran was going to run against Jim Hall in the congressional primaries. Mr. Curran, when he made his usual round of the county building for the batch of items, reaped an unexpected harvest.

He met Thad Tanner and his son-in-law, Cal Rice, of the First National Bank, in the corridor. Cal Rice's wife owned most of the Earlville *Mercury-Journal* stock; and recently the *Mercury-Journal* had been giving away jardinieres and eight-day clocks with subscriptions in an endeavor to put the *News* out of business. Old Thad and Cal were talking about it now and some of the county board were with them. Thad had boasted five years ago that he would put

"that damned four-page rag on the dump" behind Curran's shop, but still the "rag" persisted. Somehow the county remembered the day the elder Curran was stretched senseless across the dingy desk by a copperhead mob.

Old Thad was small and screw-headed, with a continually baring upper lip as he talked, and his husky voice came out of a toothless cavern of a mouth that seemed never quite able to close its grinning. Yet he had a certain clear and stinging way of stating facts, a rugged "horse sense", and profane humor that accounted for much of his dominance in the county affairs—that and his money and fighting qualities. And he knew men. He knew Wiley Curran. Wiley had an exasperating idea that Old Thad, by some intuition, had gaged year by year, month by month, week by week, the decay of the *News*—that he could forecast very nearly how much longer the malcontent sheet would keep up its barking.

"Morning, Mr. Curran;" Thad turned from the board members as the editor mounted the court-house steps. "How is our very *weakly* these days?"

That was a never-failing banter of the county boss. The farmer members were apt to smile deprecatingly; and the editor kept his temper. He wondered how the big-bodied countrymen could tolerate the boss's grin —he always was so sure of himself—and them. Old Thad felt good this morning—he had got his contracts for the creek diversion and road culvert about which the *News* had been peppering the board. Only Burt Hemminger, a pale-eyed, yellow-bearded farmer, had protested and mumbled something about the *News'*

charges that the Tanner quarries were the chief beneficiaries of the work. Boydston and Curry, the road committee, and Tanner men, had put through the contracts without comment—it was the usual program. So now the quarry boss thought he could badger the defeated *News* complacently.

"The honorable board has just voted for the creek work, Mr. Editor! You might make a note of it. But I suppose the *News* will be too filled this week with politics. We hear you're coming out against Jim Hall?"

The county men were looking at Curran. Judge Van Hart and the district attorney, Jewett, a pot-bellied nonentity, were coming from the court room. Tanner spoke purposely loud; he wanted to smoke out this joke of the editor's aspirations.

"I *am* going in the primary," said Curran quietly. The group stopped curiously. Cal Rice, ever taking his cue from the boss, laughed. Jewett rubbed his bald head. The *News* was his aversion. Wiley had hounded him as a prosecutor who never began action against any one except bootleggers, drunk section-hands and any sort of homeless men. Jewett was noted as a famous barbecue cook, and at Old Home Week festivals, Old Settlers' picnics and the like, white-aproned, genial, good-humored, he presided. During campaigns he gave bullhead breakfasts in the woods, where county politicians, prominent lodge members, influential farmers—any one who was any one—congregated, and through a night of rough conviviality—a vast glut of eating, drinking, songs and speeches—Jewett won his election. Church folk and

wives complained of these orgies, but Jewett offered his cookery and his jokes with equal facility to the church festivals and quieted the talk. Curran never attended these bullhead feasts—they disgusted the esthete's taste in him, and besides, with the unsureness of the nervous man, he did not care to face the banter of the county crowd at its wildest.

Old Thad waddled nearer to tap Curran on the arm. "Young man, congress is a sizable pill for you, ain't it? And don't you know there ain't any man gone to Washington in this district in twenty years unless he come see me about it?"

The country politicians laughed briefly. Wiley watched them keenly. "I didn't know as the nomination was yours to give out, Mr. Tanner. And you know you can't fool all the people all the time!"

The boss closed one pursy eye, grinning. "Young man, *that's* never necessary!"

The farmer folk guffawed. Jewett rubbed his stomach. Judge Van Hart, his fine face oblivious to all this, went on his way. And Wiley, feeling somehow, that he had lost an opening round in his inability to retort to the boss, crossed the Square to his office. He was furious with himself. He had planned to keep the announcement of his campaign until he could see some of the men who would be with him—Purcell and McBride, of Earlville, Jake Vance and Arne and some of the scattered malcontents in other counties of the district. But here the boss had made a fool of him before his own people at the very start! He was savage with the realization that Janet Vance's window in the county building was open; that in all

likelihood she had heard Old Thad's jest and the laughter. No, he had not done well. And his old discontent with himself came over him; the pitiless feeling that he did not measure up to the rough game men played in business and politics. He was too much the sentimentalist, that was it.

He was kicking away on his job-press when Hemminger, the recalcitrant board member, came in. Hemminger was from a lonely backwoods district up the river whose people, from poor roads and isolation, rarely came to town. He paid a back subscription, and had a rambling budget of news from the home folk. And, as always, the editor listened sympathetically, and, with thoughts far away, answered at times.

There was a whaling corn crop and it was mostly out of the way of frost. And the late pasture was drying up, and some folks were going to ship their hogs. Some folks *would,* but danged if *he* would! Some of his land, where it ran up in the bluff, hadn't done much and he was going to turn in *his* hogs and let 'em take the yield. Dinged if *he* knew what was the matter with that land!

Wiley listened. Then he took a handful of pamphlets from his desk. "Ever see these, Burt? Government reports? Maybe your land is too sour?"

Hemminger was incredulous. *Book* farming wasn't much!

"I tell you what I'll do," said Wiley suddenly. "Next time Arne Vance comes back from the agricultural school, I'll get him and drive up there and he can analyze your soil."

Hemminger's pale eyes shone. "Would you, now?

You're a busy man, Mr. Curran—runnin' fur congress and all!"

"I want to see you all."

"Sure. Folks would be delighted. Nobody comes up our way much. Up our way the wimmen still boil soap—we ain't much on newfangled ways up on Broad Bottoms. But if Jake Vance's boy'd come—we—we'd all meet somewheres and have coffee—and you could talk to us, too, Mr. Curran!"

Wiley watched him with a sudden awakening hope. "Do your folks like me up there, Burt? 'Way out in the bottom districts?"

"You come up our way. It's a right lonesome country. But we know you, Mr. Curran. You remember the time you got Abe Smith's boy out o' jail?"

Mr. Curran's mind went vaguely back five years.

"Our folks talk about that *yit!* Abe's boy hadn't done much but git too much on board. And you got him out and sent him home!"

Hemminger was stuffing the government crop reports in his pocket. "If you'd come, Mr. Curran, folks would be proud. The *News,* they say up our way, it's never scared and it's never bought. And Abe Smith's boy—well, you come up!"

He went out, and when the editor saw his farm wagon rumble over the crossing his face was lit with a fine glow. Wiley wondered what he had said or done to bring Hemminger out of his despond—he had come in beaten and humiliated from the supervisors' meeting,—the lone board insurgent against the Tanner dominance over the rich farmers of the southern part of the county. Curran saw him away off, when

he went up the path to the cottage where Aunt Abby's lamp shone—a lonely figure seated in a rude wagon that crawled up a gap of the bluff to the north between the somber harshness of the corn fields—a blur, fainter, drawing into the dusk, lost in the immensity of the dun earth, the autumn sky.

An hour later Curran was chopping his kindling by the fence. A drop of cold rain came out of the scud of cloud. Another—the vast bend of the uplands was lost in a gray veil, and he could hear the patter of drops on the tar-paper roof of his shop. He stood for a moment in the enrobing night, listening to this lulling murmur, the great dried lands sucking in the water, enriching themselves. The sear pastures would green, the black corn bottoms and the fall sowing of the wheat would lave themselves and rest until the freeze came. And slowly it seemed to Curran that never had he loved it all before. The fat Midlands, the never-hungered country! Here were the best men and women. Afar in the glut of the cities of which he had dreamed, of which he remembered, the future might be hideous with wrong and hate; but here were the best people, unhungered, unfearing.

He was carrying in the wood for Aunt Abby's kitchen box, thinking how friendly would be the stove glow after this wet chill, how fine his eagerness for the supper; the kerosene lamp under its red shade upon the table, and the hale, cheery old woman, her glasses dim with the kettle steam. But he heard a wagon stop, a man's gruff voice on the crossing below his shop. He watched curiously the figure come up the hill and lean over his fence.

It was Hemminger, the lonely and defeated farmer. His pale eyes shone in the lamplight from the window.

"I just thought I'd come back to say, Mr. Curran," he blurted, "that you ain't no money much or any way of gittin' about for congress. Well, our folks can drive you about all over the county, some takin' turns and then passin' you on, so's you see everybody. See *everybody!* And live right among us. Then when you git to Washington, folks'll kind of *own* you!" He brushed the wet off his cotton sleeve—"I just thought I'd drive back and tell you. It's our folks' way."

Then he was gone out in the night, the clatter of his wagon coming down the hill road, until the falling rain drowned the sound of wheels.

Curran went in, piled his wood, and stood before the cook-stove, watching dreamily the fire, heedless that he was in the housekeeper's way. She bantered him, and suddenly he kissed her, holding down her fat arms as she laughed, astounded, shining-eyed. This was unlike Wiley; he, the dilettante, who never quite gave himself to anything. He began to reason absently over the faith, the friendliness, the goodness he seemed to have found about him so curiously. Love, that was it. He had awakened; and all about him had awakened, discovering good in him.

CHAPTER X

ROLLING STONES GATHER MOSS

THE following week Rome had another sensation. The McFetridge twins came back. Now the McFetridge twins belonged to an older and not easily relished annal. They were the nephews of Old Mowry, the undertaker, and had been the village cut-ups before they inherited the Carmichael livery-stables. But even a livery-stable did not reform them, and promptly, on attaining their majority, they sold the stable and went off, to the relief of all Rome.

What deviltry Hen McFetridge did not think of in his 'teens, Ben did. They had been a pillar of red neckties by night and a cloud of bad cigar smoke by day on the drug-store corner, since they spent their patrimony trying to develop racers in the period when all Iowa went mad over trotting and built a mile track in every county and paid fabulous prices for mares and drivers—the days of Allerton and Axtell and Bud Doble. But the fleet-limbed Morgans have long since given place to Percherons and Clydesdales, and the mile tracks are innocuous county fairs, or raising corn to-day; and with the passing of the trotting craze passed Hen and Ben McFetridge, bankrupt at twenty-one.

Occasional rumor and reminiscences of the McFet-

ridge boys came out of the West as other sons returned, but one bleak day Hen and Ben, rotund and forty, same red neckties and bad cigars, were discovered in front of Carmichael's relating a tale of Aladdin to Rube Van Hart, the broken-down league player. They had registered at the Parsons House, slapped Miss Amelia on the shoulder, dropped their real alligator-skin cases and walked around the Square into every store and office: up-stairs to Vawter, the artist; blithely into the back room of Cal Rice, president of the First National; and to Uncle Mowry's, Dickinson's grocery and all through the court-house, bringing a presence of freckles, good living, diamond pins and dizziness. They saw everybody, "jollied" everybody—within two hours every one in town knew the McFetridge boys had struck it rich.

"Same old town, Ben," said Hen.

"Same, Hen," answered Ben. "Let's go over to Wiley's and get something in the *News* about us."

But Wiley was off trying to collect bills. He did not see the McFetridge boys until he went to the Maccabees' supper at Odd Fellows' Hall that evening. There, with Old Mowry, in his long black coat and white tie, at the door, were Hen and Ben, a self-constituted reception committee for the ladies. Wiley was always invited to lodge functions and affairs of the sort because, for his share of chocolate cake and coffee and ice-cream he would have something about it in next week's "News' Notes of a Busy Day." He had heard that the twins hadn't changed a bit, except to get fat, and Hen's diamond was in a horseshoe pin, while Ben's was set in a real and immense nugget.

Hen and Ben slapped him on the back simultaneously and spilled coffee over his best trousers.

"Hello, Wiley—you old gazabe!"

"Still running the old sheet, Wiley, that the old man used to chase us out of?"

"Yes. Hello, Hen—Hello, Ben! Yes, I'm making out about the same!"

"Poor sledding, eh? Hear Cal Rice and Old Thad bumped you when they arranged to have the Earlville papers get over here for early delivery. Say, heard about us in oil?"

"Yes."

"Big. Tulare fields, California. Hen and me was beating it from one water-tank to another one day—flippered, both of us. Cleaned out in the dray business in Fresno. Well, Hen and me coming down a cañon along the track about dark, saw some cow tracks. Now, we saw the stars shining up out of those cow tracks. Wiley, if it had been you that's all you would have seen, just stars shining back from them cow tracks. But Hen and me saw oil."

"Ben and me prospected, and lit for town and entered that whole blamed cow pasture. Then we went to Los Angeles, where all the easy marks in the United States come out, and we capitalized them cow tracks. Say, we got more engraved certificates of stock than you can shake a stick at sluing round California this very minute."

"Did they *bite?*" put in Ben—"couldn't keep 'em off with a club!"

"Crazy about us," said Hen—"us and the cow tracks. We organized, and sold more stock for de-

velopment, and blew it in; and whenever we wanted more money we assessed the stock and got it. Finally the whole company blew up—Hen was president, and they said they didn't want a president who spent all his presidential time at the girl shows in Los."

Hen looked at Ben—"Was it good, Ben?"

Ben looked at Hen—"Was it, Hen? We made those reorganizers buy us out at five hundred thou. Good—what, Hen?"

"Cow tracks for mine," sighed Hen.

"First thing Hen says was: 'Let's beat it to the old town back in Iowa and show 'em we got the money.' We climbed into a Pullman at Los and Hen gives the nigger ten dollars to buy a paper. 'Keep the change, nigger,' says Hen, 'we're going back to see the old town.' "

Wiley smiled. "I'm glad you did so well." He sighed, stilling a resentment against fortune. He, too, had swung the circle of the West and was back to the old town. And oh, what the McFetridge half-million would have done if *he* had found it! But they were right. Wiley would have seen only stars in the cow tracks—he never saw anything but stars, some way or other. But he smiled cordially: "It's great, boys. Come round to the *News* to-morrow and see me."

"Sure. We want some stuff in the papers about us. Who's doing the Earlville *Mercury-Journal* correspondence?"

"Miss Amelia Parsons."

"Oh, lord!" cried Hen—"we're *on*—big as a house! We'll have a two-column cut made of us and shove it in. Maybe you can use one in the *News*, too."

"Surely." Wiley laughed—since the days when they and Rube Van Hart and all the kids batted flies on the *News* lot he had enjoyed the McFetridges.

"Same old town, Wiley."

"Same old town, Hen."

"What it needs is a few funerals. Maybe some of 'em will drop dead when they know Ben and me got money. Where can a man get a drink in this town easiest?"

Wiley looked at Rube Van Hart. Rube winked at Wiley. The Maccabees were cluttering up the hall with cake and conversation, and Old Mowry and Hicks, the expressman, with their enormous reception badges of white satin and wired roses, were enough for a welcome committee. Rube winked at Wiley, and the four went out and down-stairs.

"I'll bet," said Hen to Ben, "that there's been as much bootleg booze drunk at Carmichael's stable since we sold out as before, and that's going some."

Rube arranged a row of beer bottles along the side of a horse stall after an errand to the hay. "Shut the door," he said: "the Methodists are coming home from Mrs. Blake's, and Carmichael's trying to corral an agreement with 'em to do all the hauling for the assembly next summer. Carmichael's wife is going to join 'em to cinch it!"

"Oh, lord!" roared Ben, "same old town!"

"We'll throw a fit into 'em," said Hen: "watch us."

Rube and Wiley drank their beer and listened. Poor old Rube, who once had batted .400 with the Cubs, and was now chambermaid to Carmichael's horses; and Wiley T. Curran, who had the ink on his hands

of a three dollar and twenty-five cent printing job from the Gem Restaurant! They listened hungrily to all this magic—they, too, had come back to the old town!

"Say," went on Hen, after all the West had been rehearsed, "we got a scheme that's a wonder. We're going to buy the tin opera-house."

"Crazy about the show business," added Ben.

"Why, these old zooks here don't know they're alive," continued Hen. "What do they get here? Swiss Bell Ringers and Flint, the Hypnotist, or some dead one with a picture show on art, that these women's clubs round up. If you want to go to a show you got to go to Earlville, and the blamed cars stop at eleven-fifteen. Now ain't that nice for a man with a girl? Suppose he wants to pull off a little eat after the show?"

"Oh, my Aunt Maria!" whispered Wiley softly. "Where—this side of Chicago?"

"Leave it to us. We had more fun out in 'Frisco with the show business than anything you ever heard of. These actors and managers think they're wise, and they did get some of our money, but we got our fun. Backed one show and it broke up for twenty thousand—but that's all right. You see there's always a lot of phony shows around waiting to be financed, and when Hen and me sail in like two little angels from the long uncut, they can't do enough for us. And when we've had all the fun we want we cut the string, and down comes the show—flop!"

Wiley's face looked vacant. Rube rubbed his aureate nose.

"Four shows now out on the coast wondering what

has become of their little angels," said Hen—"but what's the use? We wanted to see the old town!"

"What the old town needs," went on Ben, "is a silver cornet band, a semi-pro ball team, and a few hot shows in the tin opera-house."

"You can buy it of the Gamble estate for two thousand," said Rube.

"Listen. Got something more than that. Morris Feldman, over at the ten-twenty Main Street House in Earlville, was telling me about this girl who won the *Chronicle* beauty prize. Why, he says when she goes to Chicago the vaudeville managers will be climbing over one another to sign her! Morris went out to see her, and old Lindstrom chased him over the fence with a gun, and then prayed for his soul because he couldn't shoot him. Leave it to a Jew to take care of his hide. Morris finished his interview with the cowshed between him and the Dane, but he says we just got to get that girl."

"Get her?" Wiley looked startled. "You mean—"

"Sign her, and put a show out. Morris Feldman says he's found a man with a piece, and all they need's the money. And they tell me around town that this little girl's having a tough time of it. All these High Street zooks won't look at her—the Shakespeare Club gang and all them."

"Yes," murmured Wiley, "it's true. She's not very happy over it all."

"Is she pretty as the papers tout her?"

"Yes. Isn't she, Rube?"

"All the way. If she coached along the side-lines with me pitchin', I'd be rattled clear out of the box."

"It's a shame," said Ben, "if she ain't got a chance! Ain't it, Hen?"

"It is. We read that paper and we says: 'Little girl, the twins'll stake you with their last cow track!' "

"You mean," retorted Wiley, staring at them, "that you're going to back Aurelie Lindstrom to go on the stage?"

"You guessed it the first rattle." Hen looked at Wiley with the pity of the money-getter for the dreamer; and Wiley looked at Hen with the reserve of the idealist for the vulgarian. He had his old feeling of doubt when he encountered men of action; the indrawing indecision, at times, made him revile himself as a weakling.

Aurelie! Aurelie, with her hurt pride, her love that was a tragedy, her wild beating of life against her bars! Not yet had she more than dimly grasped her fame—not more than that, East and West, last Sunday, some twenty million blowsy breakfast-feeders had propped the supplement up against the sugar urn, and over their coffee and chops, had scrutinized her full-sheet presentment—that careless Egyptian face upturned, the leaves and blossoms in her hair, the simple gown betraying her slender rounded throat—scrutinized, grunted; read the "lead" of the story, grunted again; and turned to another roll and the "pink un" to scan the football scores.

But off somewhere, the gilded world had called her. The letters she got by hundreds, the congratulations and inquiries, curious and kindly, envious and ingratiating, warned her. A New York manufacturer wanted to use her face on his tooth-powder boxes—that

was the worst she knew of. And John Lindstrom, in a rage, had seized most of her mail and burned it and forbidden her intercourse with the town. She had gone about in a dream, some ineffable heartsickness, which Harlan had left with her—she fought it rebelliously with pride and anger and sullen silences. When she made one trip to town she tossed her small head along High Street, conscious that every household hastened to the windows to see her. "There goes Aurelie Lindstrom—the first time she's been out since *it* happened!"

"It" was spoken of in the best families as one would speak of a surgical operation. But even her former schoolmates didn't banter her—she went past them with hardly more than a nod, and they fell back to discuss her status, her looks, her possibilities—she *couldn't* be as handsome as Vawter's silly picture made her!

Wiley lounged into Miss Vance's office in the courthouse the next morning after the arrival of the twins. They saw Aurelie go into Dickinson's store, her red dress a brave bit of flame. Mr. Curran sighed, looking at Janet's firm pen scratching its way across a district requisition paper. "Poor little girl!" he said, "I'm desperately sorry!"

Miss Vance's cool gray eyes lifted: "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Only I'm beginning to think as Harlan did—the whole thing is horribly vulgar. I never knew Aurelie much before—but she's been at the shop. I—I've met her"—he looked away frowning at his own tremor—"she hasn't an idea of what to do—and there were *six* proposals of marriage in Saturday's mail!"

Miss Vance scratched on: "I should think much good might come of it. As for vulgarity, it couldn't be much worse than her surroundings before. I hope something comes of it for her."

"I'm afraid it'll spoil her."

"Not necessarily. Wiley, it's like you to accept it impractically."

"Why, the whole town's laughing at her. And here the McFetridge boys with their ridiculous scheme—"

"Why?"

Wiley subsided. Janet was always squelching him. "Well," he ruminated, "for a week she made the old town famous—it figured in a Chicago date-line six times, and the photographers came and snapped Lindstrom's shack, and the Sinsinawa bridge, and the North Side school where she used to go, and"—Wiley got up and sighed—"well, Amelia Parsons says the notoriety to Rome was shocking, and the Shakespeare Club ought to pass resolutions deploring the whole business!"

"Probably they will. They deplored my election also. If Aurelie can go and do anything that otherwise she'd never had the remotest chance of doing, I approve. Miss Conway said she was a very bright child in the eighth grade. And she certainly has appealed to your sentimental self."

"Eh, well!" He shrugged. "Janet, the whole thing *hit* me! The little girl is a deal like myself, I fancy. A soul in bonds. I was, Janet—you remember?" He raised his hand to the October hills. "I had to go off foot free and wander and see it all. Something beyond

all this. Aurelie's suddenly awakened, too, out of her bitterness—her love—" he checked himself and sighed. "I can understand all that, Janet. My world was gilded splendidly—and it is yet, you know. I can't get over it."

"Is it true—these proposals of marriage she gets?" pursued Miss Vance impersonally.

"Rot! Even Aurelie laughs—and tears 'em up! A lot of people bother her, indeed. But she's a sturdy little soul with a terrible simplicity and directness. Wants to be *somebody*—wants to be *somebody!* God bless the kid—I can understand!"

"Wants to be *somebody!*" Janet watched him shrewdly. "And you? Wiley, I took you at your word—you're going to run for congress."

"Janet!"

"I had luncheon with Governor Delroy up in Des Moines last week. Now, please—*please*—this is not for the *News,* remember! I told him you had *promised* to lead his forlorn hope in this district."

"Janet, I never held an office in my life!"

"Neither did Delroy until he rebelled up there in the North!" She arose and came swiftly to him. "Wiley, I've been all over the county in my school work, and all over the district at the institutes, and I say the time has *come!* You don't know the restlessness against Congressman Hall and this old régime. Some live forceful man is going to seize the chance and ride on it to success, and oh, Wiley, I want it to be—*you!*"

"You lunched with Delroy? You—discussed—*me?*"

"Yes. He was eager to know of you—he'd watched your editorials."

Wiley looked quizzically at her. Janet lunching with Delroy, the great new name in the tumult of the new politics! Of course Delroy knew of Janet. The last paper she read to the state teachers on a radical reorganization of the country school system, and the way she forced a favorable resolution through the institute against the opposition of the state superintendent, had attracted every one's attention. And Delroy, the handsome, dashing, bachelor governor—of course Janet Vance would attract him. He would be glad to listen to a woman who had twice been elected against the hostile conservatism of a Reserve county to her superintendency.

Curran sighed. "Janet, I couldn't afford it."

"Suppose your campaign could be financed—" her cool business smile was on him. And then her enthusiasm broke past it. "Oh, Wiley, it's a big game! A *man's* game! I never was so interested as in what father and Arne tell me, and what I see is going on over the county! And you're going to be in it! I told Delroy so! They'll build his organization on you and your fight down here—they're eager to break in, and the county so needs leadership!"

He smiled, but he felt the inward tremor of the man who is conscious of his limitations of daily nervous force. The need of care of it had held him from many a crucial effort, that supreme hazard of fortune; for the physical integer, after all, is the factor of success. He had tried to tell himself that youth was done, its visions, its nobleness, its lechery; its easy purity, which is virtue untempted; and its evil, which is ignorance of good. But of late had come his rebirth, the surge of

aspiration and fine hope to the shallows of his life. Now, with the prodigal years done, should come a man's real work.

He reached across the desk for Janet's hands. "Girl, I'll do it. You can tell them so. I'll make the fight!"

She threw back her strong shoulders laughing, the tears in her eyes. "That's all I want to know! Just to hear you *speak* that way, Wiley! I'm going to telegraph Delroy, and Schemmerhorn of the state central committee, and call up Mr. Purcell—and *father!*"

He was amazed as she arose with that imperious incision of hers and went out. Janet had always left him gathering his wits—perhaps that was one reason why—well, he never could analyze his admiration for Janet.

He was at his job-press that afternoon, when Hen and Ben McFetridge drove up in a begilded motor. With them was a fresh-faced young Hebrew who was introduced as Morris Feldman of the Majestic Theater.

"And"—continued Hen—"we got the little girl all right!"

"Got her?" Wiley looked up.

"Your prize winner. Old man was up in the woods with his dogs, chopping brush, and the old lady was off somewhere, and we talked with the girl. Told her we were going to put her out with a show and she most dropped dead."

"I should think she would!" gasped Wiley.

"She'll get used to our ways," continued Hen—"heavy on the job—eh, Ben?"

"Right there—eh, Hen?" said Ben. "Morris, here, has been trying to see Miss Lindstrom for a week, but

he was afraid of the dogs. But the minute he handed her a line of conversation we had her. He's got a man in Dubuque so crazy about this prize-beauty business that he wrote a play about it. Morris says all the people up the valley are crazy about it—and it shows what a dead one this town is. We can play up and down the state and get on to the Meyer & Sammet circuit later . . . say, think of the paper we can get out—three-sheet stuff and the window stuff: 'Miss Aurelie Lindstrom, the $100,000 Prize Beauty Winner.' Some class, eh, Hen?"

"Got the 'Frisco Morning-glory Bunch skinned a mile," said Hen.

"You're crazy!" retorted Wiley.

"Crazy, maybe," said Ben—"but we got her name on a contract."

"But she can't act!"

"Don't need to," said young Mr. Feldman. "Nobody has to know how to act—it's all in the line of dope you put over. Hand out some bunk that the public is crazy about and they'll eat it. And this girl's got it—biggest paper in the West has been spreading on her for two weeks now. It's a pippin. I wanted to bite myself when she signed up. Steinman & Franks were after her, too—they were going to have a man down here from Chicago to-day."

"Those big vaudeville people? I guess, if she's going in the business at all, she ought to have gone with them."

"Leave it to us," retorted Hen. "Morris read this here play to us last night—four acts, and in the third they blow up the mill!"

Mr. Curran sat down on the platform: "Hen, are you in earnest?"

"Going to clean up the state. Morris got an option on a lot of scenery that was made for the *Millie the Model* company; and it blew up, and the stuff's in Dubuque stored. And wait till you see our paper. Morris, here, telegraphed for his booking agent to pick up some people. All to the candy—eh, Ben?"

"Right there," said Ben. "And if this *Millie the Model* scenery doesn't fit Hanbury's piece, he's willing to rewrite the play to fit the scenery."

Wiley sighed: "Hen, you and Ben are wonders!"

"No, we're out for the coin this trip. And to give that little girl a chance. Honest," continued Hen thoughtfully, "she's got me going. And besides Ben and me got fifty thousand dollars of Tulare oil stock to unload and we thought maybe if we spread on this show, it'll advertise us."

Wiley looked his concern. "Now, it's all straight, Wiley," went on Hen, "and you can say so in your little old sore-backed newspaper. Morris, here, will give you a column of dope that will make this old town weak in the pins."

Still Wiley hesitated; he was supersensitive to a degree about anything concerning money despite his unpaid bills. "I—I—don't like it, boys. You see this girl—Well!" he floundered—for an instant Harlan's name was on his lips . . . then, after all, what did he know of Harlan and Aurelie? He went on doggedly: "She's a good little girl, Hen—after all."

"Bet she is," retorted Hen—"and I'm going to see she gets her chance."

The editor watched the machine roll up High Street. He went in and sat at his old desk, and lighted his old pipe, and stared at his old shop. He wished that sometime he would grow up.

CHAPTER XI

THE DAUGHTER OF JEZEBEL

HOLINESS UNIVERSITY was a square new university with a mansard roof two miles west of Rome on the Earlville road. It was softened a bit by the beautiful campus sloping to Sinsinawa Creek, but the plaster of its bricks was as raw as its curriculum, and the bricks were as hard as its faith. It is a forlorn county of Iowa that does not have two universities, three academies, one seminary, and a Chautauqua, for every migration of the early comers brought its own theology and education, from the Church of the Hollanders to the Dunkards, and every variety of Protestantism; and each planted the seed of dispute and thereafter, as the fat land grew, belabored all classes for support of the spindling institutions.

The Holiness Brethren were new in the land, but strong of voice and earnest. Calvin University, which was an oblong and flat-roofed university three miles south of town, had long since gone to seed, rarely heard from except on rally days in the churches when all its sixteen faculty and sixty-four undergraduates filled the edifices, and the rally was a tremendous success in hymn-singing if not at the contribution plate. But the Holiness Brethren, who had come from somewhere, no one knew exactly where, and preached some-

thing, no one knew exactly what, had the zeal of the newly-inspired, and labored in highways and byways for recruits. It had a community of quite four hundred souls gathered about its college tract; and fifty students who alternately farmed and studied and exhorted in the streets of Rome and Earlville. No one had a grievance against the Holiness sect except Wiley T. Curran, and his was because they had taken up one of the most beautiful spots on Sinsinawa. As Mr. Curran remarked, it was as if some one had first wandered down the pebbly-footed glen and said: "Brethren, here is a spot which nature has set apart for the tired soul to commune in silence and find peace with God—come, let us get a crowd and have somebody lecture."

John Lindstrom had become one of the zealous sect from the first; nothing but poverty had kept him from joining the Holiness colony up on the hills, and his lowland cottage was a favorite place for the Brethren to gather for prayer. These Sunday afternoons the children sat barelegged and silent on the kitchen chairs, their frayed denims washed, and listened in that perplexed and enigmatical respect that the young give to religion. The first Sunday after Aurelie's prize-winning was a terrifying one. She never would attend the meetings, and the Brethren exhorted John that he cast out the devil from her, put away this vanity of beauty, this Romish and heathen perversion. As if Aurelie, loving idolatrously her little crucifix without bothering her head as to what it meant, could put by God's gift of grace and prettiness.

The next Sunday she ran away to the hills and met

Uncle Michigan there by arrangement, for the old rebel, eking out the scanty living by his bootlegging, was no more at home with Lindstrom than the Creole girl. When they returned the old man delayed at a neighboring quarryman's house, but Aurelie went on to their door. She found the boys sitting, Sunday clean, on the wood-box behind the stove, and Mrs. Lindstrom, who cared little about the services except to give assent to the master, was putting the baby to bed. She turned a constrained face out of the chamber to see the French girl's entry. Aurelie, wreathed from head to foot in red and gold maple leaves sewed on twine—that was their Sunday occupation upon the bluff, was it?

Albert, the canvasser-pedler, was by the oilclothed table, his head resting on his palm, the shiny celluloid cuff with its immense moonstone button enclosing the stringy sinew of his arm. The Holiness exhorting had tired him, but he was calculating how much of his miserable earnings he could contribute to the family. Before him was some prospectus of a patent dish-washer with which he was going to tramp the towns and country with his whining appeal, his fatuous smile, his eternal door-bell ringing and removing of his hat to the impatient wives. He had a faint shy affection for Aurelie in his cringing soul; her color, her life, her graceful courage, were like some bloom of a tropic garden to his aridness. He would have loved, with a dog's love, anything that did not rebuff him, turn him away, snarl coldly, shut the door on him, so crushed was he with this in his day's work.

Aurelie felt the ominous heaviness of John's look,

but she was strangely gay. She came past the pedler, touching his thin hand lightly. *"Mon ami!"* she bent her head with quick grace, "you look tired—is it so? You should have been with me—and Knute, too, and Peter. The leaves—they never were so pretty!"

She crossed to the silent boys, the maple wreaths rustling on her gown. "Eh, Peter! It's all from the big sugar tree where we killed the badger last winter—and you froze your fingers while we were chopping." She lifted the skirt of leaves with her laughing: "Brother, isn't it like a princess on me?"

She held herself to be admired by them. Albert put down his documents, his pale eyes shining. This girl! Catholic, French, rebel—God knew what—she stood a flame in the dreariness of their lives!

John came in, took off his rough coat and hung it behind the wood-box over the boys' heads. His gaunt face was heavy in the light of the little lamp; he came to stand before Albert, looking down at the pedler's pitiful business.

"And what's that on the Lord's day, Albert, man?" his deep voice queried. "It's not an example for my children after prayers."

The pedler sniveled and smirked conciliatingly; they had of late begun to fear John's Puritanism. "Eh, the business, John! I was just casting over it for to-morrow. To lay out my route beforehand, that saves a sight of tramping, and it's to be colder."

"It's no work for the day," growled John. "Didn't Brother Rutherford just now warn us against such unholiness?" He turned to his sons: "Come, Peter—Knute—it's soon to bed for you. Bring in the kindling

and be off." He was not unkindly—he was but a man in whom a wrong was burning its way steadily to a cloistered and spiritual purity; the law's harsh enigma, the murk of his day's jailing—they were to him a martyr's portion; they had set him apart in the world; God had smote him for some reason or other, and he accepted. He sat watching the silent urchins, the mumbling pedler pulling his cuffs down over his thin wrists. The mother passed with the baby, and John put a hand softly to its head, but the rasp of his palm drew a sickly wail. He drew back silently, in some pathos at his failure. When she had gone into the chamber, his eyes slowly went to Aurelie, whom he could see before the mirror of her little white dresser in her room. She was patting the sugar leaves around her shoulders, admiring, reluctant to take them off.

"My girl," John called, "come here."

She did not move; he saw her face harden. "Come here." She turned and looked at him. "Aurelie, I called you, girl."

"What is it?" But at his silent gazing she came out obediently. He looked again long at her, the daughter of Jezebel, whose eyes did not fear to meet him. "Where have you been?"

"In the hills."

"Whom did you meet?"

"No one. Just Uncle Michigan and me."

"I heard this morning—and Brother Andrews told me—that you were on the creek road talking with some one in a red machine?"

"Yes—this morning." She did not falter; she was as stolid as he.

The McFetridge motor-car, a snorting, grinning, scarlet devil charging, of a Sunday, about the stillness of the roads—he was ruthless in his analysis, for he knew. "They brought you home from town this morning—but they dared not come to the door."

"No," she retorted. "It was just a little ride."

"Ah, Lord," the wife cried from the chamber, "the girl, she'll have her name up more than it was! The papers and all—Lord save us! And ridin' with a Jew on Sunday morning!"

"Be still," John went on stolidly. "I hear more than that. Girl, can you pray with us all to-night?"

"Pray?"

"With a clean soul?"

She looked at his eyes, the deep eyes of a prophet, and she could not answer; she paled and muttered, and half-turned to look at the little rosary hanging over the frame of her dresser among her trinkets.

"I hear," he continued with an awful deliberation as one who had foreordained his judgment and his course, "that you are going on the stage!"

She started—she could not imagine that he knew. And yet all the town must know, must be amazed at this freak of the McFetridge twins. "Papa Lindstrom," she said with a sudden brightness, "will you listen to me? It will be a fine thing for us all—the money I can make!"

"Answer!" he shouted, and stung the table with his blow: "the truth!"

"Yes," she answered steadily, her eyes going to hard rebellion.

"May God strike you dead first!"

Knute looked up dumb and shivering. The mother put her head from the bedroom. "Ah, John," she cried, "she's a good girl with it all, John!"

"Be still!" he said. "This beauty of hers—I'd burn it off her if I could." He got up and paced the kitchen, his lined face twitching. "Cleanse her, Lord," he muttered, "put this foul thing from her, Lord!" And from the woman sobbing now in the chamber came a wailing "Amen!"

The girl stood in her robe of autumn leaves. "Mother, the money I could earn! And you know how we all need money."

John stopped before her: "Hell's money! Harlot's money!" He suddenly grasped her wrist: "Eh, this face of yours—if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. What's evil in God's sight, destroy it!"

She repressed a scream at the pain of his clutch, at the murder in his eyes. The wife ran out crying. "Ah, John, let her be! She's a good girl, now—a good girl to us all!"

But the fanatic held her closer, thrusting her up against the kitchen door among the dusty quarry clothes hung there. "Can I sit and pray God with this unclean rebellion in my house? Unclean—unclean"—he thrust her harder against the door—"you will renounce it—tell me!"

She looked back: "You don't understand—you don't know anything—"

He shook her until her voice choked: "Answer!"

"You have no right—"

"Answer!" he shouted, and shook her until the house jarred.

When he ceased she threw back her small head in its frame of crushed leaves. "No!" she cried swiftly, and then fought him: "No—nothing!"

He suddenly smashed her against the door. Its flimsy fastening gave way, and she was hurled out, falling to the porch. They heard her cry, but none moved. For a time they watched Lindstrom, huge, hairy-armed, in the doorway. Then he turned to them: "Go back," he said to the mute children, the wan wife, "we'll have prayers now."

But. after prayers the woman stole to look out dumbly into the cold moonlight in the yard.

CHAPTER XII

THE ANGELS APPEAR

IT was ten o'clock, and, though Sunday, Mr. Curran was running off the last of the handbills for the A. O. U. W. ball, kicking the tread with his foot, inserting the paper with his right hand, and withdrawing it with his left. The rhythm of the press' clank was as exact as this shift of his body as he thought of the day—some day or other—when the *News* could afford to put in a motor for this drudgery. The curtains were drawn, for it would cost advertising if the church people saw him kicking the press on Sunday night. He hummed an old melody, for Wiley was always happy when he worked, whatever his shift of fortune—it was brain-clearing, and the clank of the old machine always soothed. Up over the dusty front windows he saw the tops of the trees in the Square silvered by the moon, and the weather-vane on the county building. Sunday nights the Square lay in deep peace—only the Gem Restaurant, "Home Cooking—Chicago Style," was lighted, save for the blur of the bank window where an incandescent showed the vault front to Marshal Bee if he chanced to be out of bed.

He was distinctly surprised to have Aurelie come in—and yet not surprised; he had a notion that he must have been thinking of her. He rubbed his inky

hands on a spoiled handbill and took hers. "Why, Aurelie!" He looked over her dress with its girdle of sugar leaves. "Been moon-gazing up on Eagle's Point again?"

"I ran off," she answered, and sat down with a sigh. He saw a quiver on her features—a grimace as if she wanted to cry and would not. "Seems like nothing but trouble comes of it all, Mr. Curran!"

"Ran off?" He smiled. "Not very far, Aurelie; and I'm glad you ran to *me!*"

"Oh, Mr. Curran—don't make a joke of it! Poor little Peter was so scared! I had a quarrel and left everybody—and I'm not going back. And I just came to you, for you're the only friend I've got."

"I hope I am one, anyhow." The editor nodded his young-old head. "Somehow, I expected you'd have trouble. John—when *he* heard of it."

"What hurts me is Uncle Michigan. He can't hardly get about any more. And it will just *kill* him."

"We'll fix it up, Aurelie. You stay with us here, for a bit, and Uncle Michigan can hobble down. How's the leg?"

"The wooden one's all right, but he's got rheumatism in the other one. Mr. Curran"—she sat forward brightening, and unfolding her hand, dropped a bit of crushed paper on the table—"there's the prize! A check—one hundred dollars!"

One hundred dollars! And she had never possessed two in her whole life. The editor sat staring at it. Poor little prize!

"It's a shame," muttered Mr. Curran—"they ought to give you a million. But it's just a newspaper graft

to work up circulation. Just advertising, Aurelie. They think the glory is enough for you."

"I don't want any glory. I want a cork leg—for Uncle Michigan. Like the one in the catalogue Hen McFetridge gave him. Do cork legs cost a hundred dollars?"

"I think so. One of those legs that bend and twist and seem as good as a meat one—yes, sir, I'm afraid they do, Aurelie."

"You put this check away, Mr. Curran. And I'm a-goin' on the stage and save up my money and buy Uncle Mich the best leg there is anywhere."

The editor folded up the beauty prize. He put it in his pocketbook with a sigh. "I've not seen so much money in—I don't know when! It's just grand of you, Aurelie, to think of Uncle Mich. And so you're really going on the stage?"

"I guess so. I'm sick of everything. The letters I get, and all this publicity—it's just upset me, Mr. Curran. And Harlan, he went away"—she looked off —"and left me."

Mr. Curran sighed. For his life he could not have asked her further, but with an instinct for her underflow of trouble, he knew. Youth was not so far away from him—nay, it was crying in his heart! He wished guiltily she would say more of this amazing summer romance. He loved Harlan as he had loved few.

"Sometime I'll tell you," she went on; "but now I just want you to tell me what to do."

"About going on the stage?"

"Yes."

Wiley rubbed his head. What he knew of the

stage was not much. "I suppose you must do something. And the McFetridge boys—well, honestly, I think they're straight, down in their hearts. They're pretty near impossible and rough, maybe—but some way, I don't think bad of 'em." Mr. Curran never thought bad of any one, even Old Thad. He was always apologizing for Old Thad to Arne Vance's denunciations. "And I can't blame you, Aurelie"—he looked off above the silent park—"the town's no place for you—perhaps for no one who's young and eager to live." He sighed—"I know how it is . . . I had my fling." He took her hands and drew them across the desk: "I'm going to take a great responsibility. I'm going to tell you—go."

"Yes, I'm glad! I like you, Mr. Curran. You make me feel that you had trouble, too—and weren't afraid, and were misunderstood. And so I'm *going!*"

"That's right. And be a good little girl, Aurelie, and don't let 'em spoil you."

"And some day I'll come back and play in the tin opera-house!"

And they laughed. They went out through the dingy old shop and up the path in the moonlight, he holding her hand, both laughing. She seemed so like himself—he could understand all that she could not say.

Aunt Abby listened, and then set them out Banbury tarts and milk. "Dearie—dearie—I'm glad you've come back again—and to us in your trouble. And if you want to go to be an actress and marry millionaires, so there—go do it, and don't mind what this town says!" Aunt Abby was a vigorous, broad-faced old

Philistine and a great cook. Wiley had found her on his wanderings, sitting on the tongue of her prairie schooner, watching a dead mule that she had depended on to take her out of the Dakotas when the chinch-bugs ate the wheat, and she had abandoned her claim. She had kept house for him ever since, fat, decently sixty, and filled with huge chuckles. And the laughter came back to Aurelie's eyes that night, though she did lie awake wondering about Uncle Michigan—a good thing about wooden legs was that one couldn't get rheumatism in them.

"Wiley," grumbled Aunt Abby, when Aurelie was in bed—"that girl is suffering . . . she's terribly in love with somebody!"

"Yes," he answered mournfully, pulling off his shoes in the doorway, "I'm afraid so. But she'll get over it—we all do. I have, myself—a dozen times."

"Get out—you never got over *one* of 'em! The accumulation of 'em is what's the matter with you." But when he was in bed, the old lady came in and patted his cheek: "You ought to get married—even if I have to leave you."

"I wouldn't—not if *you* had to leave me—" he answered, "oh, not a bit, aunty!"

The next day he took Aurelie over to Earlville. Bravely he faced the stares along High Street. As the bob-car jogged to the Junction, where it connected with the interurban, the Van Hart surrey drove past them. Mrs. Van Hart was in the rear seat. Aurelie sat back against Wiley's arm and then, conscious that he noticed it, she sat forward very straight and stared full at Harlan's mother. The surrey drove on, the

lady composed and with kindly elegance, apparently not seeing them. Aurelie sighed and said nothing, but Wiley guessed her tumult. She was very silent when they were in the tiny office back of the place where tickets were sold at the Majestic, the ornately impressive vaudeville house in Earlville, across from the equally ornate Elk's Club. And if you want to see what architects can do in yellow sandstone, see the Earlville Elk's Club.

In Morris Feldman's office, young Mr. Hanbury, of the Dubuque *Register,* one time sporting critic, explained his play modestly: "I don't claim this piece of mine is any world-beater; it'll never see the great white lights, and Frohman will never get the wires hot trying to book us, but that's all right. We're after the kush, ain't we, Morris?"

"The what?" gasped Miss Lindstrom.

"The coin," corrected Morris Feldman, "the money, Miss Lindstrom."

"I ain't saying Belasco'll go nuts when he sees our production," went on the playwright, "but we're going to clean up the one-night stands while the public is ripe on you. Ain't I right, Morris?"

The gazelle-eyed young Hebrew held a bunch of blue tickets in his teeth while he slipped a rubber band about them and then deposited them in a tin box: "Believe me," he murmured.

"And if we ever put over that third-act situation with you climbing over the mill-dam, Miss Lindstrom, you're made."

"Believe me," added Morris, "and here come our angels."

Now, Hen and Ben McFetridge, coming in from a Main Street billiard hall, each with a bad cigar and a red necktie, were not exactly of the celestial choir. They crowded into the box office and felicitated, and offered chairs and rubbed hands.

"I was telling Morris, here—and Miss Lindstrom, the show's a bird," went on the author genially. "Miss Lindstrom, I want you to read the script right away before we get the people together for rehearsals."

"But I"—put in Miss Lindstrom flutteringly—"can't *act!*"

"Neither can any of the rest of 'em. All these hothouse stars are traveling on their reps. Acting died with Joe Jefferson. What you do now is to go around and hand out the bunk, and the rawer it is, the more the public falls for it. And here the biggest paper in Chicago has been handing it out for you, Miss Lindstrom, the warmest line of talk that any actress ever stood for. She's made, ain't she, Morris?"

The fat-legged young Hebrew, for all the world like a prize calf, waddled about and murmured to the box teller. Hen and Ben poured out their cigar fumes; Wiley lighted his pipe, and they all smoked the histrion-to-be—until her eyes watered.

They all claimed credit for "discovering" her. Young Mr. Hanbury, of the Dubuque *Register,* went on praising his handiwork, and again Aurelie put in: "Oh, Mr. McFetridge, I don't know how to act!"

"Leave it to us," ruminated Hen.

"Walk right out in front and slip it to 'em," cheered Ben. "The yokels will be so dead crazy to see the $100,000 beauty that they'll forget you can't act."

"Oh!" she murmured, and gazed at Wiley T. Curran.

"I rewrote the big third act soon as Morris, here, told me you couldn't act," went on young Mr. Hanbury encouragingly. "All you do is to come in and look dazed and take the spotlight for a minute right at the climax, and then Miss Norman and the heavy, they run in and grab the situation. You see we give Miss Norman most of the fat stuff."

"Oh!" said Aurelie faintly.

"Yes. There ain't many girls like Miss Norman who'd stand for you taking all the paper while she does all the work."

"You don't hardly have to open your face," added Ben consolingly.

"They'll all feed up to you," added Feldman.

"Wait till we get to Dubuque and have a reading rehearsal," concluded Mr. Hanbury.

"And wait till you see the clothes we give you in act two," said Hen. "Ballroom scene. You discover that maybe you're the bank president's daughter."

"Oh!" Her eyes appealed to them—what it was all about she didn't in the least know.

"But the detective swears you're the daughter of the big dip who was operating among the guests in a dress suit. Then—zing! You confront him and deny it—he brings the dip on whom he just pinched in the anteroom, and you do the big flop."

"The what?"

"Faint. See?"

"N—no."

"Miss Lindstrom," put in Morris Feldman, "believe

me—don't listen to these here playwrights. Mr. Gratz, the stage manager, will see you're coached. We're going to take you to Dubuque to-morrow, and Miss Norman, she'll help you, and don't get cold feet on this. We're out to grab the one-night stands while the jay towns are still talking about you, and we don't care much what the play is."

"But remember," warned young Mr. Hanbury, "any time you don't know what else to do—faint. Then we'll jump the mob on, pull a quick curtain, and the hicks out in front will think it's great. And Gratz will blow up something off-stage. You see—" went on the playwright confidently, "I wrote the piece that way—loose!"

"But, oh, Mr. Hanbury! When they find out I can't *act*—"

"Miss Lindstrom," put in Morris Feldman complacently, "they'll never find it out until we're beating it to the next town."

"Beat it in and grab the money, and beat it out—" corrected Angel Hen McFetridge joyously.

"Just a joy ride all the way," chirruped Angel Ben seraphically.

The future star seemed dazed. She bit the end of her frayed little glove. Wiley Curran looked nervously at her: "Hen," he said sadly, "this is simply awful!"

"I guess it is. Worse than cow tracks. But the rubes are just spoiling to be stung. And now we're all going to have lunch at the Metropole to meet Miss Norman. We're going to advance Miss Lindstrom one hundred dollars so she can get some traveling

clothes. Maybe"—he added delicately—"she'd like to shop this morning."

One hundred dollars for clothes! She looked helplessly at Mr. Curran. But here was Angel Hen McFetridge calmly counting out the bills. She didn't know what to do—she sat fingering them and staring. And then she murmured some thanks and was out in the sunlight with Wiley, blinded by the effulgence of the money and its magic.

The conspirators back in the lobby looked after her. "Nice girl," sighed young Mr. Hanbury. "Got me dippy."

"Young man," warned Ben, "you ain't no playwright when we get started—you're only the advance man. Don't let her worry you. You blow over to the *Mercury-Journal* and slip 'em half a column. And slip in something about me and Hen cleaning up fifteen thousand yesterday on Tulare oil up five points. It reads good."

Morris Feldman's calf-like face was put through the box-office window: "Now, easy on this oil talk with the papers. We're troupin' now, and don't queer the show."

And after the McFetridge twins had gone, Mr. Morris Feldman hunched young Mr. Hanbury in the ribs. "Don't get so sloppy about the girl before these two fatheads from California. Keep off their route. Let 'em unhusk. What we want is for 'em to loosen right down to their shoe tacks."

Young Mr. Hanbury sighed. He was far too young to write plays even if he was sporting critic of the Dubuque *Register*. "But they can't have the girl," he

murmured, "I'm dippy about her. Morris, she's going to be *it!* I'm stuck on her, Morris." He took out the second act and looked over it and sighed again —"Ain't you?"

"In a month," answered Morris solemnly, "soon as she gets to know how to wear the clothes these two blobs from California are going to buy, that girl is going to pull the whole show away from Norman—act or no act!"

And the next day they went away in a chair-car up the valley: nine of them, the two angels in red neckties, the playwright, the manager, the stage director, the second woman, the leading man, the juvenile, the heavy and the star. The actors were all very pleasant, which was right, seeing that they had been stranded in Earlville for a week and none of them could get their baggage out of the hotels until the McFetridges advanced the money. So they were all very pleasant, the second woman chewing gum and reading a dramatic review, and calling Aurelie, "Dearie". The rest of the histrions sprawled about over the seats, rather unshaven and dowdy; while the heavy man told Aurelie all about his wife and two babies, and the petunias they raised in a window-box last summer when they were playing stock in Toledo. And by and by, for he knew she had had her salary advanced, and no one else had, he confidently borrowed two dollars. And that night the pink-cheeked juvenile told her about the hit he made in Denver in summer stock, only now he was crazy to get back to Broadway and sign up with Frohman, and he borrowed two dollars.

And the next day, after the reading rehearsal, when the others were there, from Chicago, and they all sat about forlornly on boxes and wheezy chairs on the cold dark stage, listening to young Mr. Hanbury read *The Beauty Winner;* while carpenters mauled and hammered in front of the curtain, the leading man came to Miss Lindstrom. He was gently humorous, even with his sad eyes; and he said apologetically: "Miss Lindstrom, you know my wife? Yes—that girl in gray—Miss Frazier. Well, you know I sent her every cent I had to come on and join us—and she had to leave every rag she's got in a North State Street boarding-house. You see the poor kid's been up against it all season since *The Rounders* failed. Well, I—don't know any of these people, or the McFetridges, or I wouldn't ask you . . . but could you let us have ten dollars till pay-day?"

He saw her eyes flush with sudden tears, and she gave him twenty, and a smile that haunted him all the gray day's work. She knew so well how it was!

"Little girl," he whispered softly, "we're a bunch of hard troupers, but you made a hit with us. You don't need no prize face—you'll *do!*"

CHAPTER XIII

MR. CURRAN ALSO HAS A VISION

THE brown and stately autumn faded to the first bleak coat of winter. The hills grew clearer in outline, and over the sycamore, elm and linwood, patches of the distant river showed. One saw lonely roads rising from the black bottoms to the gashed bluffs where summer had robed this nakedness in green, and down these came the farm wagons miring under loads of yellow grain. At the cribs the droning shellers' song mingled with the roar of the quarry crusher, and this not unpleasing duo of industry was in the village's ears week long. Every one was autumn busy, what with the husking, the hog-killing, the spreading of fertilizer and the hauling of wood.

Curran was busied also with a rush of holiday job-printing. He shortened his editorials and stole personals from exchanges to have time for this bread-and-butter work. Janet found him so when she came in with the program of the county teachers' institute. He declined to print it before Thanksgiving. "But the *News* does need the money!" he concluded. "For, Janet, the *News* is going to run for congress!"

He was happy as a boy over it. He had been seeing a number of people, he assured her. "Surprised 'em! It seemed quite a novel idea! But do you know it's

much as aunty says. For fifty years the *News* has given columns—free advertising and ticket printing to every church fair, raffle, oyster supper, and what-not in the county—boosted all the benefits and lodges, welcomed the labor unions over around Earlville, pleaded for the farmers' cooperative association, and all that—and never asked a thing from any one. And now when I go to these men—just the run of workaday men—and tell them I'm going into the primary against Jim Hall, they look surprised and then say: 'Why, of course, Wiley!' Just as if we all ought to have thought of it before!"

"Of course!" she smiled gravely. "What did I tell you?" And she did not subdue the pride in her voice.

He was cleaning his hands of the printer's ink to go up the hill to his supper, talking eagerly all the time. Janet must come up and see the new window-boxes he had made for Aunt Abby's primroses, working nights and between times; and presently she found herself, as of old, going with him laughingly up the path back of the shop.

"I'm not a dead failure!" he declared. "If only a man comes to have a sense of his place and work somehow things appear brilliantly easy. You see, before, I never stopped to inquire anything. Life appears simple enough to a man who has but two shirts—he takes off one and puts on the other! And that's all I've been doing here in Rome, Janet—till now."

"And now?" Her serene glance was on him as they reached the crest by the fence. He suddenly caught her hand and lifted it to point away over the town, the twilight country, the veiled immensity of night.

Here, there, a lamp shone in a house; distantly a light twinkled, and far off on the still land one caught yet another.

"Their homes," Wiley whispered—*"theirs!* The people whom you wish me to go to—the rough-coated and silent farmers driving into town, toiling away, but *thinking,* too. You wanted me to go among them, tell them that I—Curran of the *News,* was of them, and would fight for them if they would let him! That what they believed in and honored, *he* believed in and honored. Janet, I stop here every night on my way up from the shop and draw in the air—this fine air of the country, and watch the lights come out in those far-off farms on the hillsides, and a vision comes to me of them all—their homes and lives and destinies. I see it all and understand, and it's as if they were calling me—as if there were work and place for me!"

Janet nodded slowly. Her fond smile came. So well she knew him! It had to be that way with him—an appeal to his imagination, his heart, his undefeatable and simple romance. Well, so good. She would be practical for him; she would find the way. He stopped now with a sudden rueful curiosity.

"What's this I hear about you being asked to go out and speak in the national campaign for women's suffrage—the big fight in some of the states?"

"I was asked." Janet looked away. It had been an anticipation come true. She had had her eyes on wider horizons; she had felt the supreme pleasure of efficiency, of power recognized. She went on calmly: "But I declined it, Wiley, this year."

He was watching her face in the dusk. "I know

why," he retorted abruptly. "It was to stay here and help *me*."

"Yes."

He was silent. Some consciousness of her bigness, of the richness of her life, was finding way into his vision. It was portion of his new delight in all this buoyant modernity, just as he had awakened to kinship with the Midlanders, stern with the sense of patient and long-endured wrongs, and needing leadership. His esthete's indrawing, his dabbling with art and affairs, had got him nothing; life had rebuffed him, but now he had come upon realness. Janet suddenly typified all this; he saw her and with her all women as the new enfranchised companions of men, the efficient helpers and counselors.

"By George!" he broke out. "You're coming on so grandly, Janet! I always guessed at it, but you've grown so! 'Way—'way beyond me!"

"Most men are in a state of arrested development in their view of women," she answered, "playthings to be possessed, or parasites to be endured. But a companion, reliant, helpful, *demanding* freedom, *extending* it—I thought, Wiley, you would grow to see that, too."

"Yes, yes—" he cried, "I can!" He was fired with her largeness, her faiths. But she left him to go home with a trace of playful cynicism.

"If you will only keep the oncoming way, Wiley!" She shook her head. "But, to-morrow, I'll find you back again, the old indolent chap—Curran of the *News*."

He waved an ardent protest. When Aunt Abby

came home from the Congregational Sewing Circle, where she was loved for her helpfulness, and reproved for her tolerance of Mr. Curran's beer drinking, she found him staring out at the starlit country.

"Aunty," he murmured, "why do you suppose I never make any money?"

"Some men jest have it in 'em, Wiley; and some jest run country papers." She took off her black and lavender cap, but powdered her nose again, for she had only waddled home to get his supper and then she would be off once more to assist at a church social. As she cooked, her nose grew redder, and when she was done with Wiley's supper, she powdered it again. It was mortifying indeed to a good rotund lady, who knew that when she came to The Circle to join in the rejuvenating of small Congregational "pants" for the home missionary box, there would be a sniff or two, for some way or other the fragrance of Mr. Curran's shameless beer drinkings would cling to her still. He had a bad way of hiding the bottles in her clothes closet or among her bonnet boxes, and then roaring abominably when her nose, on Sewing Circle nights, took the sympathetic hue of his own.

"That limb, Wiley T.," she would plead to the church people. "But, sisters, the Lord has been putting up with him for forty years, and I guess until *He* forbids, I shall too!"

"That limb, Wiley T.," knew vaguely that he owed much to this loyal championship in circles he did not enter, just as he did to Janet Vance and her faith in him. Women were always doing for him, one way and another. And he had carelessly allowed them;

they were a part of the old Dionysian delight of life, the youth he had given so fully, and which even now called to him above this eternal dawdling over the damp paper on press day, the clank of the machine, the grind of work. Getting out the *News* was like having a baby, so he told Aunt Abby. The press groaned excrutiatingly; there was much daubing of ink, flapping of belts, heaving of rollers—then off it came, a squalling brat, this Rome *News,* without profit to its parents or reverence for the neighbors.

Arne Vance came home from his agricultural school holiday week, and one bleak day brought in a farmer who had a grievance. Somehow or other, every farmer with a grievance had been finding his way to the *News* office for the last forty years. Bert Hemminger, the insurgent board member from the North Bottoms, was with them. The newcomer took a huge ear of corn from the load of his wagon and wrathfully shook it in the editor's face. He had failed of a prize at the seed warehouse's annual distribution, and *he* knew what was the matter!

"They give it to that Dutch tenant who farms Dan Boydston's west eighty. And what did *I* get, hey? Skunked—yes, sir—*skunked!* And there ain't ary ear of my load that ain't better'n Boydston's land can raise. But I know. Boydston's a board member, and Tanner's man, and Tanner owns the seed company! That's it, by cracky! *Politics* and *rotten!*"

The editor listened sympathetically. He always did. The farmer roared and flourished his disprized seed ear. He was "agin the tariff" and the administration

and everything else. It was rotten when a man couldn't get a blue ribbon on corn like *his* corn!

Arne Vance fingered Mr. Sourds' product. He chewed a grain and felt over the golden spike. "It's good," he commented, "but the kernels break before they run over the nub, and they're shallow. Ike, some day I'll show you how to judge corn the way we do up at the agricultural college."

The man was suspicious of this fool book-farming.

"And let me send a dozen of your ears to the state board," put in Curran. "He's a great man, that secretary. He'll sit down and write you a letter worth all the ribbons Tanner's seed house could give you."

Ike Sourds did not know. He was sure there was something crooked about it.

"I tell you what we'll do," exclaimed Hemminger. "This editor, he's going to run for congress in the primary, and we want him to come out and Arne with him, and they can talk politics and seed corn together. Hey, Arne?"

The farmer-student's black eyes snapped. Go? It was a great idea! Hemminger's sad eyes lit. The suspicious Sourds grew interested. "By jinks, if there was anything like that going on in Hemminger's district, our district ought to have it, too! We wa'nt much for style, our folks, in Number Five, but Arne Vance can come talk seed corn and sour soil, and then this editor can get up and whale the plutocrats! It's a right lonesome road out our way, but we take the *News* and we *know* something!"

And he and Hemminger went off with a promise. Curran watched the shaggy farm horses steaming in

the cool sunshine, the bundled figures on the seat, until the wagon drew into a gap of the hills. They wanted *him*, did they? After all, his yelling brat of a paper *did* find its way out to the lonely farms and was read and believed!

He turned to discover Arne watching him curiously. "You're going, Wiley?"

"Sure!"

"We'll elect you, Wiley! *We—and* they! Quit your grubbing away in this dinky shop and come out among us! Janet's been seeing things very clearly. There never was such a chance—the county needs a leader. I'm telling you what the young men say over the county. And there's Father Doyle, who's trying to build his church up among the foreigners at the new mines, and McBride, this state labor organizer, who's working to unionize the new factory people around Earlville—none of them cares a damn about the old gang in this town—the best families and the court-house jobs and all that!"

"I know," said Curran quietly. "They've both talked with me—urged me."

Arne's eyes glittered. "Janet—" he muttered grimly. "*Her* work!"

The editor was musing. Janet, again. Always Janet! She seemed behind every manifestation of his new place in the hearts of men, his awakened ambitions, his power to be himself. The enfranchised and free companion, demanding freedom, giving it; that was what she had said the modern woman could be! He was awakening to this magnificence in Janet. And yet she must love him—she could do that also! And

slowly his dream grew to a vision of a love past the common call of sex, a passion ennobled by the riches of her personality. There would be none of the parasitic clinging to a man, the need of sentimentalizing shelter and protection. The helper to power, the counselor to a widening life—this would be the woman to come! This would be Janet!

He met the elder Vance next day, Jake, the political farmer, the malcontent, an original Greenbacker, a mugwump, party trouble-maker, forever given to standing about the Square Saturday afternoons in his moth-eaten, old buffalo coat arguing with the countrymen. He could not have been elected to any office, but he had not soured. His children had inherited his reasoning unrest, but they had disciplined it to achievement.

"Somebody to beat Hall—somebody to beat Hall!" he roared. "Folks say it's comin' to be you, Wiley! I get it everywhere except in the *News,* and in the banks and warehouses and the court-house! The county ain't what it used to be—there are mines and factories—and *libraries* and labor unions! The old gang doesn't realize that. It's you, Wiley, all the kickers want. And I hear you ain't got the money? Ain't some of these new real estate men and boomers over in Earlville *close* to you for that?"

"Not much. Cal Rice and Thad are in with 'em on most of their deals."

Jake went out in the frosty sunlight. "Don't forget," he growled, "that there's a sight of people who *ain't* in any deals! Arne, let's go home and feed stock with that contraption of yours up in the haymow!"

He looked off across the Square to the window of the school superintendent's office: "I guess that girl of mine is ready to go home, too!"

Wiley watched the Vances drive off, the three of them in Jake's old buggy. "Jake used to travel to political conventions in the smoker, and, at twelve o'clock, pull a basket up between his legs, spread a newspaper on his knees, eat his chicken and sweet pickles, and then pitch the paper out the window, but when Arne comes back from college he eats in the diner and uses a finger-bowl," he told Aunt Abby. "And they have *two hired girls* at the farm! Janet and Arne make up the price of the dining car and the maids by figuring out soil analysis, or new school methods, and don't bother their heads with picking chickens, or putting up lunches."

"Well, there'll come an end," she warned; " 'tain't in nature for a farm to stand two hired girls, or even one!"

He laughed: "Get on the band wagon, Aunty!" Then behind her, in the fragrant kitchen, he saw Old Michigan warming his leg across the wood-box. Michigan grinned expectantly:

"Done got a letter from our little girl, Mr. Curran! And I done brought it up here first thing for you to read."

"Aurelie?" Wiley was conscious of a disappointment that she had not written him. She had sent a post card from some town, with a blithe comment, but little news, only that everything was all right. Now he reached eagerly for the letter in the old soldier's hands. Aunt Abby stopped her cooking as he tore it

open. Then they lost the world in Aurelie's tale of wonders.

"What she done say, Mr. Curran?"

"Fine! Says you'd look good to her, now, Uncle Mich. She's having the time of her life. Everybody's good to her, and helps her, and the McFetridge boys are just grand, and everything's grand." Wiley looked shining-eyed around: "That's the most of it—just *grand.*"

"Wiley," said Aunt Abby severely, "I did hope she'd not get her head turned!"

"Not a bit. She says: 'Uncle Mich, the first night I was scared, and when I walked out there and tried to see over the lights I just wilted—*inside!* Mr. Gratz stood in the wings with the book, and Hen McFetridge kept waving to me not to cross so far, and Mr. Feldman kept whispering something from the other side, so I guess I must have *looked* scared. I tried to speak and couldn't say a word, and I looked hopelessly off, and there was Mr. Hanbury having a regular fit because I was going to spoil his play. He kept shouting to himself and dancing around: *"Dried* —I knew it!" Then that made me mad, and I glared at him, and then I heard what Morris Feldman was trying to whisper, and I said, *"Father, I am here."* And just right, too, Sol Gratz says—just like the haughty young beauty I was supposed to be, who's under suspicion of being a thief. Because I was mad at Mr. Hanbury and his old play! And every time I lost my lines they all helped me—every one, and you *ought to have seen what the papers said!'"* cried Mr. Curran—"I wish I'd seen that paper!"

"Go on," said Uncle Michigan. "When's she coming home?"

"Don't say," answered Wiley. "Says the hotels are pretty bad, and the theaters are cold and dirty, but it's just a *glory!* Oh, lord—Aurelie!"

"Likes it?" queried Aunt Abby, from her doughnuts.

"Says she's got a *mission!* To uplift the stage! Oh, lord—*Aurelie!*"

"But when's she comin' home?" quavered Uncle Michigan.

And looking in Michigan's eye, Mr. Curran saw a tear.

"She doesn't say, Uncle Mich. She just says she's sending a number of things for 'you-all' out at the Pocket—with the first money she ever earned! Christmas presents for you and Knute and Peter and the baby, and Albert and Mrs. Lindstrom—and for John."

"And John, he prayed so mighty hard he chased her off the place! Reckon she's the same old girl, Mr. Curran?"

"Sure, I think so, Uncle Michigan."

"Don't reckon this yere stage business'll ever change her a mite, Mr. Curran?"

"Hope not, Uncle Michigan. Darn the smoke—it's getting in our eyes, ain't it?" Mr. Curran coughed and spluttered; he didn't want to see the tears on Michigan's whiskers. The old man thumped the wooden leg on the box and against the stove preparing to get out of the house. "Uncle Michigan," said Mr. Curran, "stay to supper and we'll talk about Aurelie. Gee whiz, I hope that little girl makes good!"

"You want me to stay to supper?" Uncle Michigan turned to Aunt Abby—"You're church folks, and I done been an ole whisky pedler Johnny Reb."

"You done been an old fool, Uncle Michigan! You sit right here till supper's ready!"

"Right here till supper's ready!" added Mr. Curran. "Here's some more of this letter—"

"But not any word about comin' home!"

"She'll get home. She says up in Waterloo the comedian got drunk and nearly busted up the show. And that night they had to cut out her big situation."

"What?" gasped Aunt Abby, "cut out her—*what?*"

"I swear—"

"Well, it can't be serious or they'd telegraphed!"

"I guess so. She says Mr. Hanbury changes his play so much they just can't keep up with it in rehearsals, but that Sol Gratz thinks pretty soon they'll get it all over."

"Get over what—over the operation, I suppose, Wiley?"

"She's picking up this stage slang so fast she must be getting on. I swear, it's a fine letter."

Aunt Abby was peeking at it over his shoulder. "What's that? She asks if any one ever hears from Harlan Van Hart?"

Wiley sighed. "Yes. She—sort of knew Harlan." He folded up the letter and handed it to Uncle Michigan, who stared at it as if it was a jewel.

"I reckon," mumbled Uncle Michigan, "you done better keep this in your safe at the office, Mr. Curran."

"That safe rusted shut in '96, Uncle Mich—the time

the creek flooded the *News* office—and it's never been opened since."

"Well, you better keep this letter in the clock, Mr. Curran—or somewhere. I wouldn't lose it for the best leg I got." He handed it back to Mr. Curran, and the editor locked it in the clock case. "When I git lonesome, I'll come up here and we'll read it all over again. Kind o' lonesome at the ole place. John, he's sourin' on the world. Keeps the boys cuttin' brush. And the baby's ailin'. And the woman's frettin'. Seems like the sun don't shine so bright since Aurelie went away."

"Don't you worry, Uncle Mich. She'll come back rich and famous, and everybody'll be happy, and she'll give a show in the tin opera-house."

Uncle Michigan's eyes shone again. "Just as Ole Captain Tinkletoes prophesied down in Louisany! She'll done grow up to occupy the land!"

Mr. Curran's eyes shone, too. He had been told Aurelie's fantastic story, oh, these many times! He had gilded it, enshrined it—loved it.

"Our little girl, Uncle Mich!" he cried. "Out in the big world fighting her way, and not being scared! I never think of how she came to me but I want to gather her up and shelter her, protect her"—he stopped slowly—"love her—" he sighed. Then he turned away from them and looked down the hill to his shop. "Eh, well! I reckon *I* am the man who is in a state of arrested development concerning women!"

CHAPTER XIV

BACK TO THE OLD TOWN

SPRING comes about Rome by simple tokens. In the black bottoms the willows gently free themselves from the soiling snow, bend upward ever so lightly, and presently are wands of furry gray. In the clay gaps of the hills one hears the tinkle of water under ice and over rock, answering the first call of the robins. The rabbit tracks along the fences drabble down to mere muddy markings in the snow and then are lost in the first faint green. Also, in town, housewives hang their rugs on the porches and beat them, stopping to look up at the blue and breathe, as if the winter's housing had taken a bit out of their souls which now was coming back; and one sees the children digging their toes into the mud on their way to school, testing eagerly its release from the frost.

But chiefly, in Rome people know spring has come when Rube Van Hart disappears. When the former leaguer began to climb the hills in February and look off south; and when his work in Carmichael's stable grew slack and his eyes vacant and his promises to coach the high-school ball team more vague; and when he came silently in the *News* office to read the "pink uns" of the Chicago papers, paid no attention to Jim Mims, the tramp printer asking for a chew, or

to Wiley when he asked who looked good for the second cushion with the Cubs since Delahanty was sold—paid no attention to any one at all, but wandered down to the Junction and dreamily read the names of the box cars jogging down the cut, why then it was safe to set out garden truck—spring had come.

Then the *News* announced that Rufus Adrian Van Hart, one-time catcher with the Cubs, had gone South to help with the spring try-outs at San Antonio and would also get himself in condition. This pleased Rube and all the town kids and hurt nobody. Poor old Rube was merely stowed in a box car getting away just because spring called and baseball was here and he could not help it. Among the Van Harts there was no accounting for Rube.

And when Rube came back to town the women knew it was near time to take in house plants and let the children go for hazelnuts, and resume the lapsed work of the Shakespeare Club. With Rube watch for a nip of frost.

But now spring, and Uncle Michigan spading up Mr. Curran's garden, disputing with his housekeeper while they knelt in the black damp earth over a package of seeds magnanimously distributed by the Honorable James S. Hall, M. C. Their voices came to the editor at his desk. Jim Mims had gone to the blind tiger in the haymow of Carmichael's livery-stable; and Aleck, the press boy had stolen off to Sin Creek to see if it was yet good bullhead fishing.

"If I'm ever going to congress," murmured the editor, "I must fire this spring fever and scold everybody into working." He was watching Janet Vance tie her

team of colts to the county-yard hitching-rail, her trim, blue figure against the young elm green. She looked at her watch decisively. It was early for a county officer to be down-town. She came across the street with her direct and springy step and to the *News* door. The editor took his feet off the desk and waved his hand lazily.

"Janet, let's go fishing. Let's get Old Mowry's wagon and take Aunt Abby and Jim Mims—if he's sober—and Mich and Aleck and all go fishing."

"Wiley, that's what you've always done the first spring weather. But this year—*now*—"

"Don't finish it. *Now*—congress—"

"I drove in behind your back lot," she went on calmly, "and I see that the W. C. T. U. ladies are right. The size of that pile of beer bottles in your alley! Just suppose you'd bought books all your life instead of beer?"

"Janet," Curran smiled at her, "I never had a place to put the books all my life. But there's always been a place for the beer."

She looked at him in her old despair. "Now—now—" he went on and waved a hand at her, "don't scold. I'm up—I'm doing! In for a career—congress—anything! But the weather, Janet! Can't a fellow sit once in a while over his pipe—and watch you through the smoke, perhaps—and dream?"

She shook her head. "I know," he went on lugubriously. "The problem with the new woman is, *will* she ever let a man go fishing?"

She smiled but continued her directness: "Tom Purcell, of Earlville, is going to take the active manage-

ment of your campaign this summer. The committee of the Progressive League decided on him."

He shrugged. Up the cliff back of his shop the bluebirds were calling. The committee of the nascent Progressive League—and Janet—had kept Mr. Curran plugging rather steadily all winter. He had addressed farmers' institutes and gone to state conferences of the Progressives, had met Governor Delroy and the men of the state organization—"glad-handed around the circle," as he put it—and had also gone among the men of his own county,—lodge meetings, church fairs, district-school entertainments. And on Arne's visits from school they had taken long drives to lonely precincts where they had discussed farm problems from Arne's new angles, and Wiley had told the men simply and frankly that he wanted them to vote for him in the primary.

"I don't know any other politics," he assured Janet.

"You don't need to. The county crowd knows now your candidacy is not a joke. I hear Judge Van Hart has written Congressman Hall that he'd better come home and look over his constituency. They *feel* you, Wiley!"

Wiley opened a benign eye. "Apparently, Tanner and Rice and Boydston are organizing this Retail Merchants' Association, the secret motive of which is to get the town's advertising withheld from the *News*. That's one angle of the fight. Janet, I shan't have an advertiser left except the undertaker and he wants me to take it out in trade."

"Be serious, Wiley!" she retorted—and then Uncle Michigan stuck his old squirrel-skin cap in the window.

"April, Mr. Wiley, and dewberries air ripe down in Louisiany!"

"And the mocking-birds are singing in the cane-brakes, Uncle Mich!"

"And if my ole house-boat wasn't done stuck hard and fast up yere—and if my little girl hadn't done gone off in the show business, I'd—"

"Uncle Mich!" roared the candidate, pounding the desk—"shut up, or I'll never get to congress! Blue-birds up Eagle Point! Bullhead fishing! Aunt Abby sowing lettuce! Get out of here with it all! Take April with you!"

"Uncle Michigan," smiled Miss Vance, "we're trying to talk business. Now you know that business and Mr. Wiley—"

"Fine!" cried the candidate—"Uncle Mich—"

Old Mich took off his cap. "Miss Vance, I know what gets Mr. Wiley. Done been my little girl!"

Miss Vance was impassive, Mr. Curran amiably evasive. "*Your* little girl? Mich, you old scoundrel, you haven't a sign of title to her. Why don't you tell us all—who was Aurelie, to begin with, and who was Captain Tinkletoes? It isn't right to wink and grin when people ask you about her—people never know what to believe!"

"Reckon decent people believe only what's good—and the others don't count. But my little girl come of better stock than those big bugs on High Street."

"Well, who?"

Then Uncle Michigan did his abominable old trick. He leaned close and shut one eye tight and opened the other very wide, drew up his face so that the white

whiskers, sticking out in all directions, made his face like a sunflower. Then he exploded his famous joke: *"She done come from the Holy Family!"*

Then he doubled over with laughter. That settled them! He roared it to Father Doyle when the good priest tried to settle Aurelie's patrimony; he chuckled it to Aunt Abby and the Epworth League ladies; he discomfited Mr. Curran and all the town with it—his little girl was descended from the Holy Family!

"Uncle Michigan," put in Miss Vance distantly, "what is Aurelie doing these days?"

"I dun-no exactly. Mr. Wiley will read you her letters."

"Mr. Wiley!" She looked at him. Mr. Wiley sighed. "Got a telegram from Hen McFetridge yesterday. They played to S. R. O. at Marshaltown. And another one from Cedar Rapids says: 'Biggest house here since ninety-six.' Janet"—he looked at her with the first burst of enthusiasm she had seen this morning—"Aurelie's a winner!"

The woman of thirty was looking off to the hills. "Wiley, I wouldn't publish all the things you do about her in the *News*. It's not good taste—all those press notices and things. And it doesn't do you any good in your new—career." She had hesitated and looked full at him. Uncle Michigan had gone back to scratching his garden bed. "The town says—" again she paused at his resentful wonder.

"The town says what?"

"That you must be rather in love with Aurelie."

He was on his feet before her. "Janet! They say that?"

"Well, you've run on in such enthusiasm about her. Of course it's just your way."

"My way? I can't help what the town says. The town made an outcast of me much as it did of Aurelie in the old days. But by George, Janet—*this!*"

"She is the sort you would love, Wiley. With all her courage, the brave fight, as you say she is making—she is one of the superlatively feminine sort—or at least what you men stupidly imagine is the really feminine. Appealing to your absurd chivalry, as you call it; but actually your vanity—clinging to you and so giving you an enlarged sense of your strength, your wisdom, your indispensableness to womankind! Come now"—she smiled good humoredly—"isn't that the type of woman you like best?"

He faced her with a hurt laugh; she had begun with a touch of bitterness which her common sense subdued.

"The parasite? Not the woman who can help—and who dares *demand!* You men are all primitive in your ideas of women, Wiley."

"Janet," he answered slowly, "you don't understand. A child, misplaced, hurt, proud, struggling for the bit of good she sees—that is what I saw in Aurelie. I don't deny her appeal. I've felt like taking her in my arms and saying: 'Why, you dear kid, you ought not to be in this business!—knocking about cheap hotels and in such shows. You ought to have a home—a shelter—some one—'"

"That is just it." She smiled impersonally, and briefly. "Well, no matter, Wiley. Only I wondered why the bluebirds were calling to you this morning, and not congress! It *is* spring, Wiley!"

But Mr. Curran was put out and angry. He did not want her to divert the matter with her serenely measuring smile. "Janet!" he cried again. "I don't love her—no, no!"

"No—no! Merely attracted. As you are to book-poster girls and the magazine-cover girls!" She laughed now. "Oh, well, the eternal masculine!" Then she turned to him stubbornly: "But you are coming through this fight—this campaign—this *man's* work for us all."

"Yes," he answered quietly. "I will. And you've hurt me, Janet. But perhaps you were intending to."

She left him with another banter. He had a feeling that she was guessing shrewdly at the struggle dimly growing in his mind; he was trying to grasp her larger standards, her victorious self as a woman of the time, and his yielding to the common thrall of men in this chit of a girl. And he gave it up as a bad job, and turned to his work. But he observed that he *did* work the rest of the day, savagely and with effect. He would not listen to the bluebirds.

Bluebirds and spring ushered in full June. With his shop and his outer activities he was busied, but not too busied to read the scrawly letters from Aurelie which Uncle Mich brought. Things had happened. The McFetridge combination had barnstormed the Northwest and then booked into a Chicago stock house. Then it lost the money garnered on one-night stands. The city did not seem to recognize last year's winner of the beauty contest. The *Chronicle,* having worked its subscription lists as far as might be on the exploitation, was rather indifferent to Miss Lindstrom. Other

reviews were perfunctory. Morris Feldman said it was Mr. Hanbury's "rotten" play. But every one cheerfully admitted that, even young Mr. Hanbury of the Dubuque *Register*.

All this between lines of Aurelie's exuberant letters. She was undaunted. She was expanding vivaciously, throwing herself into work, living every minute. Her first glimpse of a city fascinated her. She bewildered Uncle Michigan with her adventures.

"That limb of a girl," commented Aunt Abby, "she ought to be home. It isn't doing her a mite of good, Wiley."

"Home?" murmured Mr. Curran. "Where is Aurelie's home?"

"She ought to be gathered up and taken care of!"

"Yes." Mr. Curran sighed. "I think so too, *now*."

The next they heard was of a wrangle between the McFetridges and Morris Feldman. Then Mr. Feldman was "out", and the "house was dark" and she was boarding with Miss Norman who was a "perfect dear". Then the company reorganized with a lot of expensive scenery and a new play which the "angels" had procured. Then they had a summer booking and Aurelie was to be "leading lady!" Out in the West again somewhere! So Aurelie put it.

Mr. Curran was struck dumb. Aurelie a "leading lady"! He could not kick his job-press that day. "That girl," he mused, "must just be running that show and the twins and everything!"

"Done goin' to occupy the land!" chuckled Uncle Michigan.

One afternoon when the sugar trees over the town

were summer-heavy, and from the uplands came the faint click-click of the first mowers, and the young corn was high across the black bottoms, Mr. Curran, looking up from his press, saw the Van Hart surrey at his door. It held two suit cases and a bulldog the like of which in jowl and legs Rome, Iowa, had never before seen. And a broad-shouldered young man was descending. Mr. Curran threw proofs to the wind and seized his hands.

"Harlan! Back to the old town!"

"Fine! Going to stay, Wiley. Not exactly at the head of my class but I got through comfortably." Harlan drew himself up and looked across at the dingy windows of his father's old law offices above the bank. "I'm going to buck into the work, the worst you ever saw, Wiley."

"It's great. So many of our young men drift West or to the cities. But you—right here with the home folks."

"Right here." He looked at his friend with the old affectionate intimacy. "I hear, Wiley, you're going to run for congress!"

"Yes. They got me into it. We'll make Hall busy, too."

Harlan smiled gravely. "Father wrote me of it."

Wiley glanced up at him. "Your father isn't for me, Harlan. And he's a pretty big man. But—eastern. We're rattling on pretty strong for 'em out here! Direct elections for senators, the initiative, the recall of judges—the control of wealth by the state—the new democracy, boy. But you know all of it. The old dreams we used to argue in the *News* shop! Why we

—the old *News* and I—we sort of raised you, Harlan. *We* made you as much as Harvard!"

Harlan smiled. Wiley's eyes were shining. They had a great brother love, a faith, a pride.

"What's got into you, Wiley? You're changed—you're awakened! Your campaign—the big fight ahead? Is that it?"

"I shouldn't wonder! Everything seems changed. Even the old town—God bless it, it's come to seem green and fair and livable! Yes, I awakened, Harlan. So's the old town! We're even going to have a new building—the McFetridge twins are going to remodel the tin opera-house."

"Yes?"

"And they've got a new show out. And the leading woman is little Aurelie Lindstrom!"

His friend's face had hardened. "Yes," Harlan muttered.

"You knew?"

"Yes. I read of it—I sort of followed her—in the reviews." Harlan was gathering up the lines. "Wiley, —I—wish I had saved her!"

Wiley's hand closed over Harlan's on the dashboard. "Boy," he murmured, "I didn't mean to bring this old matter up." Then his face lit with a sudden exaltation as if he had put a great hope to the test. "Tell me—you do love that girl, Harlan!"

"I did love her once," retorted Harlan squarely. "You might have guessed why I wanted her out of this. And *you* got her into it!"

"And now?" Wiley muttered. But Harlan drove on suddenly and without looking back. The older

man watched him with a feeling that the fine zest of spring had dulled in him. He seemed trampling on some rugged loyalty to the best thing in life—the faith of friends. He sighed as he went back to his shop. "Got her into it? Bless her, I did! But I couldn't explain to any one what it's meant to *me!*"

But the bluebirds in the maples did not call so jubilantly as they had the summer long.

CHAPTER XV

FIGHTING BLOOD

THE last week of June Mr. Curran received this telegram:

"Busted at Broken Bow. HEN."

He showed it to Aunt Abby, and Uncle Mich, who came around every week with a letter from Aurelie for Mr. Curran to read.

Mr. Curran sighed. "Broken Bow is a jerkwater station out in the short-grass country. Western Nebraska. Pretty tough. I been there—I was busted, also."

"I hope," said Aunt Abby, "that the child hasn't been compelled to have anything else cut out, even if it is busted."

Mr. Curran explained that this was merely the theatrical company. Then they put the telegram away behind the clock where all of Aurelie's letters and press notices were kept. The next week came Aurelie's explanation. *The Beauty Winner* company was stranded. All that expensive scenery and the reorganized troupe had gone for nothing. Business was very poor, Hen McFetridge explained, and the actors were clamoring for their salaries. All except Aurelie who

received hers every week and sent most of it home. Aurelie intimated that the twins were getting hard up. She heard frequent discussions of oil and Verde copper stock and other matters extraneous to art. And the following week Mr. Curran, in Earlville to see some of his political confrères, was surprised to see Morris Feldman in front of his ten-and-twenty cent Main Street vaudeville and moving-picture house.

Morris rolled his calf eyes complacently. "Those two big blobs from Tulare, California, Mr. Curran, what they don't know about the show business is much, believe me. They done some fierce things. Why, up in Bozeman, Montana, Mr. Curran, those two big ginks from Tulare, California, they leased the hotel and turned everybody out just because Miss Lindstrom she didn't like the room she had! Can you beat it? Nobody in that hotel except our bunch of old hams. Say, and Hen and Ben hired a chef in Denver what stuck 'em for three hundred a month to go along and cook for the troupe because Miss Lindstrom didn't like a breakfast she got one morning. And that old bunch of hams we had playin'—some of them troupers hadn't had a square meal since eighty-one. Why, Hen and Ben blew in more money on cabs some days than we could play to in a week. And they plunged on oil and played poker, and nobody got any salaries; and then they let *me* out. They let Hanbury manage the back of the house after that; and believe me, anything Hanbury manages is frazzled before it starts."

"Well, what'll the company do now?" said Mr. Curran.

"Walk," commented Mr. Feldman.

"And the twins?"

"Back to Tulare. Oil."

"And Miss Lindstrom?"

Mr. Feldman turned a limpid eye on Mr. Curran. "Miss Lindstrom, she'll make good if she ever shakes that crazy bunch. I said: 'Little girl, you get the clothes and go to New York. You got the stuff in you and you look the part.'"

"Actually?" Mr. Curran stared.

"Believe *me*. What broke up the show was the twins got stuck on her."

"What?"

"Dippy. Hen and Ben laid awake nights thinking how to put it over each other. Flowers, cabs, candies —every girl in the bunch was in on it, too. Aurelie Lindstrom ran that whole show and the twins paid the bills. Then we blew up out in Nebraska. When I left, them ham actors was trying to walk out of the hotel wearing two suits of clothes apiece and leaving their trunks behind; and Hen and Ben were buying drinks for some rube and trying to sell him oil stock."

Mr. Curran was worried. He asked Aunt Abby if he should not send Aurelie some money to come home on. But he didn't have any. Then another letter came. Aurelie was playing "summer stock" in Denver. "Miss Norman and me, but I'm not leading lady any more. I'm doing ingénue bits. Leading lady with Hen and Ben around was pretty bad. They were so *foolish!* And it was such a noisy play, for the farther West we got, the more shooting Mr. Hanbury insisted on putting in. The big situation always gave me a headache."

"Land!" murmured Aunt Abby, "I thought she had that cut out?"

"But, Mr. Curran," ran on Aurelie's letter, "don't you and Uncle Mich worry about me. I'm working hard and everybody seems to *like* me. The juvenile I play against is good-looking—quite distinguished. But everybody borrows my money. I'm awful sorry for Hen and Ben—they were broke completely. Hen came to me and said: 'Little girl, we aren't sorry for a cent we ever blew in on you. If you don't want to marry us, you don't have to.' So they went back to Tulare to hunt more cow tracks, and if they find oil again they're going to make me a bigger actress than Mrs. Fiske. Yes, sir—you *see!* Why, I just cried when the twins went West—busted. They were grand good fellows after all!

"P. S. I'm going to send Uncle Mich some more money next pay-day to pay on the cork leg. And, Uncle Mich, I saw a mountain. Just like you said when we came up river to occupy the land. Only such a teeny mountain way off—like a baby's toe sticking out of a blue coverlet! Lots of love. AURELIE."

"Done never forget Uncle Mich!" cried that old rebel thumping his peg-leg joyously on the wood-box. "And I done promised I'd never peddle a pint o' whisky long as she sends me money!"

"Mich, I understand John won't let the family have a cent of Aurelie's money."

Uncle Mich winked wisely. "Knute and I sneak 'em in—underclothes for the baby and socks and truck. John's too busy with his soul and plannin' to drive

Tanner's men off the creek survey to think about Aurelie's show money now. Devil's money, John says. But it buys things for the baby, Mr. Curran. Just like my old bootleg money, somehow. But these here Holiness people that got hold of John, they don't think o' that."

"John's a fool, Uncle Mich. If the county decides to divert the creek down the Pocket all you squatters will have to get out or be flooded."

"Not John. He says the God o' Battles done told him to fight. Mr. Curran, there'll done be trouble sometime over that."

"I'm afraid so," Wiley sighed. The deal for the turning of Sinsinawa Creek back from the uplands above the town to its ancient channel which led to the bottoms above Tanner's quarry, had gone quietly through. Everybody favored it, except the outlying farmers who grumbled that it was another piece of favoritism, or maybe worse. "Tanner's boards," however, were an always present grievance. The only item of interest the *News* found in the proceedings was that Harlan Van Hart, Esq., son of Judge Van Hart, the latest addition to the Winnetka county bar, made his first public appearance as an attorney for the Tanner company to argue for the ordinance. Wiley "spread" himself in the most approved rural journalistic fashion on Harlan's effort, but he sighed—and sent the clipping to Arne Vance.

And not even young attorney Van Hart, toiling away that summer in the little side room of the firm of Donley & Van Hart—names reversed, you notice—getting up his briefs and citations, knew that in *his* little

side room in the bank Old Thad Tanner chuckled and roared. The *News* actually commending something that *he* had done! But that fool editor didn't really think Van Hart's boy had anything to do with it? He took the paper to his son-in-law, Cal Rice, the pallid cashier. "We gotta get this boy, Cal. We gotta get him on the ticket next fall, if he can hold the *News* and these sorehead cusses who've started that Progressive League over in Earlville. Yes, sir, Cal—a mighty clever boy, and a good boy—like his father—steady and safe. The party needs more young men like that—and maybe it would be just as well to put old jelly-belly Jewett off the ticket this year and run Harlan for district attorney."

Old Thad joked about this to Judge Van Hart the next day; and the judge frowned. He deprecated politics. But when he went in the bank Cal Rice said something about it. Then the judge mildly and worriedly told his wife. Her eye brightened. Harlan should have a career in the state—certainly. But it was absurd to talk of it his first year out of school. But the next day Old Thad stopped her surrey to speak of it when she was shopping about the Square. He had a joking and yet deferential patronizing for the Van Harts that always made the good lady detest him—as much as one may the richest man in the county—and the most influential.

Meanwhile Harlan plugged away. He seemed more reserved, but still his genial self. He picnicked with the girls of his set along the river; the High Street young people wandered in and out of his mother's home at informal summer dances, and played tennis on

the lawns, and ate ice-cream of evenings, and flirted on the veranda much as they had done since he was sixteen. Nothing was changed, only he was now a man at a man's work. Much like his father, people said. From his office window Harlan could see the judge drive in town behind Old Dutch, tie him to the rail and walk slowly under the maples to the court-house steps, speaking gently to every one, bowing with old-time courtesy to the women, patting the dogs—a fine, upright, beloved figure of a man. That was what he should come to be, doubtless, a sturdy, unfearing, clear-minded American of the best people.

And once as he watched the court room windows with the June sweetness straying in, he thought of that evening when John Lindstrom's hoarse and despairing voice cursed his father and the law. He felt that even now the hurt of it was on his father's mind. A hurt growing with what the town was slowly coming to think of Lindstrom. He had defied society, cut himself off, a religious fanatic, in his patch of corn land in the Pocket. Only last week, a shotgun under his crippled arm, the gaunt quarry worker had come upon the surveyors on his land running the line for the diversion dam and forbade them further entry. Harlan remembered that he had heard Marryat, the good-natured sheriff, telling his father that he would have to drive out and have a little friendly talk with John. The somber quarryman was a "bit off" maybe. Taken his children out of school, forbade them to mix with the town boys and all that. The judge had not answered. Harlan knew in his heart there was a grief and an outrage he would not reveal. People had whispered that John

had become an outlaw from the day Judge Van Hart put the taint of the jail on him.

Then to Harlan's mind the thought of Lindstrom brought the memory of another summer—the long quiet evenings when he had met Aurelie in the hills. It seemed that he must have been desperately sorry for her to love her so. That was it—her pathos and her grace and prettiness and all the magic of the summer. Now he heard her discussed about the verandas by the nice girls he knew—her notoriety, the laughable idea of her going on the stage! And backed financially by the McFetridge boys! It seemed to Harlan, as the nice girls talked of it in the hammocks and over their ices, that all that was cheap, unworthy, grotesque, utterly apart from all he had known, had come to gather about Aurelie.

"Imagine!" said Elise Dickinson in a group about his mother's porch one evening. "A traveling man who came in papa's store yesterday told him that Aurelie Lindstrom was being billed in a stock company as the One Hundred Thousand Dollar Prize Beauty—and was wearing diamonds! I don't suppose they are *real!*"

Mrs. Van Hart was watching Harlan's face. She was thankful that none of the younger set had ever known of her son's summer infatuation. Now Harlan's firm lips closed as coldly, his square jaw set as hard as his mother's had done the night Aurelie was dismissed. The mother's placidity was unruffled. "As real, my dear," she murmured, "as her beauty prize. As an advertisement for the newspaper she was undoubtedly a success, however. But the diamonds—are

those men who used to run the livery-stable still her managers?"

Ever so carelessly! But Harlan's jaw set more doggedly. She had stung the last refuge of his pride. The McFetridge boys—and Aurelie!

And the story of those diamonds wandered over the town and grew and grew. First a mere brooch, then a necklace—after that a tiara! Playter, the druggist, told Wiley Curran of Hen McFetridge clothing Aurelie in diamonds out of the exploitation of his doubtful oil speculations, and Wiley called him a liar. The *News* lost another advertising contract right there.

Wiley told Aunt Abby about it that night at supper. She looked curiously at his drawn face. "Wiley, I don't believe it. That girl's as good as gold. And good girls don't sell their virtue, Wiley—they *give* it away, maybe, because they love. And Aurelie doesn't love Hen McFetridge—the twins just amuse her. Her letters show that."

And the old lady waddled to the Sewing Circle that night to hear what she could hear, to defend what might be defended. There was need. Aurelie was the town's daughter of scarlet long before half the missionary boxes were filled that year, and the Shakespeare Club was done with its critical study of Desdemona's story. Aunt Abby was unable to counteract the Shakespeare Club digressions, for the Shakespeare Club was composed almost wholly of High Street ladies. And Shakespeare Club gossip, though covert and well-bred, was as deadly. The Rome Shakespeare Club held itself aloof. The Earlville Woman's Club was busy with civic programs. Every time the Rome Shakespearian

ladies had a paper on *Twelfth Night* or *Lear,* the Earlville women had a protest to the city council about street lighting or the saloons or the need of shade trees. As the *Mercury-Journal* said: "The Woman's Club was the livest booster in the burg."

The Rome women never boosted anybody except Shakespeare or Ruskin, or The Intellectual Development of Europe, or The Court of Louis XIV.

There were two persons in Rome who were silent about that gossip concerning Aurelie. Harlan, lounging in Wiley's shop as of old, after the day's grind, reading state exchanges and bantering the editor on politics, never asked of her; nor did Wiley relate of her letters. Apparently their friendship drifted back to the old affection, yet there was this one reserve.

Wiley would look up from his job-press to find Harlan's serious face turned to him in a study. Harlan was easily the best-dressed man in the county; even the drummers about the Elks' Club in Earlville, or the Hotel Metropole, were no more punctilious as to business garb. And Wiley was in his shirt-sleeves and well inked sleeves at that. Invariably they drawled at each other with summer laziness: "Hot, isn't it, Harlan?"

"Yes."

"Bucking hard?"

"Some dinky line-fence case Donley turned over to me. Justice court. Term's closed, and dad is off to the St. Lawrence for vacation."

"Make a note of it. Farmer caught a big catfish—seventy pounds—at Ellick's Ford Thursday. Dig up a squib about that!"

Harlan lazily wrote out the copy; it was the old

high-school habit to help Wiley get out the *News'* personals. Also to jibe the editor about his paper. "Worst country sheet in Iowa, Wiley—worse and *worst!*"

"I know. But still able to squawk occasionally." Wiley was distributing type as Jim Mims was fishing. He kicked the job-press half an hour, and then did the printer's work under the impression that he was getting both tasks farther advanced somehow or other. "Still able to make Old Thad cuss. Even if his Retail Merchants' Association is doing its best to head off all my advertising. Thad can round up the county to put through his Sin Creek steal, but still the *News* can call attention to it."

Harlan stirred: "Still you praised my argument before the board."

"That was *you,* son! But as to the creek diversion, every one of those poor devils in the Pocket will be drowned out."

"They haven't a sign of title. And every property owner on the north side will benefit."

"Sure."

"You're hurting your political chances, Wiley."

"I know. But I can't help that. The under dog gets me, Harlan. I been one, myself. I have to fight for 'em! Mine own people! I can't stop to consider whose land is benefited, or who has the title at law. I'm only thinking of those people who fought floods and droughts and stumps to make themselves their little corn patches and keep their children alive on them down there. The *News*—" his hand patted the splintered old type case fondly—"it's always fought that

way, somehow! It's never right—it's always wrong. Ask any of the law-abiding, respectable people in town and they'll tell you so."

Harlan smiled. "Here on the start of your primary campaign, you're making enemies of your home people. And I want you to succeed, Wiley. In spite of Hall being a friend of father's—and everything. I hate greed and oppression as badly as you do. Only—"

"That's it—*only!* It's hard to go against one's class, isn't it? Hate oppression, hate wrong—only except one's privilege, one's class, one's tradition. Why, right here between you and *me,* boy—in our little prosy village, is the whole problem which confronts the nation! We give to Tanner, to the property owners—our *sort*—the privilege of exploiting others who can't help themselves. And a hoary tradition of the courts exists to defend the privilege. The courts"—he checked himself, but hotly—"Harlan, come on over to Earlville to dinner with us Sunday night and meet this McBride, the chap who's organizing the soft coal miners. He's a new article in this county—and he's behind me in this fight against Hall. I want you to meet him."

"McBride, the man who defied the supreme court last year and went to jail for it?"

"Yes. I'm glad he did. He made a lot of people stop and think—and that's what we're after."

The judge's son smiled tolerantly. "All right. I'd like to see him. I'm curious. But his friendship won't help you, Wiley."

Wiley smiled in turn. But thus it came about that Harlan and Arne Vance came over to the seventy-five-

cent table d'hôte dinner at the Hotel Metropole to meet Mike McBride. The dining-room of the Hotel Metropole, all excessively new and Earlvillian, with a tapestried wall of stiff-necked steeplechasers, gorgeous dogs in four colors climbing a fence; while over a bulging and lavender hill dashed a motor-car, the cloud of dust and the ladies' veils forming a diaphanous perspective in five more colors, which, with the Hunt Club dogs and the riders' coats, made the picture of General Parsons above the Parsons House mantel over in Rome, seem old and faded. You would understand at once that it belonged in a town which had an interurban, and an Elks' Club, and pressed its trousers, along with other cocky modernity. But neither Arne Vance nor Wiley T. Curran let on to being impressed, for they had dined in a number of the beplastered and multi-colored cafes of ambitious western cities. And Harlan, on his first visit to the Metropole, looked about with a smile and then at McBride as he stirred his *demi-tasse*—even the girl waiters said *demi-tasse*—now in Earlville.

"This is a live-wire town," McBride was saying, "and when it gets through laying out parks and boosting factories it's going to go after you fellows over in Rome who've run the county so long." He was a short, thick, red-browed man to whom one would rather break disagreeable news over the telephone. His fingers were hard and stubby, and he dug sugar out of the bowl and dumped it into his *demi-tasse* without so much as a glance at the dogs done in four colors. He went after local affairs like a man who could assimilate more significant facts in a week than all the best people of the county could discover in a lifetime. "That

county ring has run things ever since the war, and long as the tax rate wasn't too high the business people didn't growl, and Tanner fixed every board to suit himself—and hogged all the county work. He's a good man, this Tanner—I like his method—he gets things. But we ought to get him. A live grand jury would smoke him out in no time. And a district attorney who'd throw the gaff. The one you got is a crook."

"I agree," murmured Wiley—he felt too amiable after his seventy-five cent occasion, with dogs in four colors, to be the zealot. "New blood is needed. But there's some good men on our side the creek, also."

"Skunk?" queried McBride.

"Sinsinawa."

"Call it Skunk. Then we'll get down to brass tacks. I always wanted to talk with some of you fellows from the county seat. State labor is right with the governor in this progressive fight. That's the reason I'm down here. I'm here until this district is organized by the Delroy crowd. The governor wants Fairchild's seat in the senate, and he wants Jim Hall's scalp in congress, because he thinks Hall will get the old crowd's support for it if Fairchild can't win out. So he and his people are going to put Curran over and I'm with 'em. I ain't no reformer, but labor is going with 'em. But first we ought to clean up this county."

Wiley mused. Arne, his black eyes snapping, listened as if a fresh breath had come somewhere out of a fighting world. Harlan wondered rather satirically why an outsider should come down here and talk like a man of authority.

"The Catholic vote in them new mines where the Poles and dagos have come in, it'll be for Curran," went on McBride. "Father Doyle gives it to me straight. All that's good. And this new Earlville contracting company, which is sore over Tanner gobbling all the work, is going to unload on the old ring. Ain't any *re*-form going to get far unless some one expects to clean up something. Take it from me. We're going to elect Curran."

Harlan had listened more acutely. He had begun to resent Wiley's problematical success. McBride was worse than he had dreamed. His father's ideals of politics had not encompassed such brute truth. McBride turned his blue eyes under their red brows directly on him.

"Are you the man they're talking of for district attorney?"

Harlan stared at him incredulously. The easy ingratiating standards of his father's sort of men around the court-house, even the rustic geniality of the county board members, he felt equal to, but this ruthless analysis and militant directness of the man of new conditions jarred him. He still stared at McBride.

"Come out," rasped McBride, "we can put you over this year. I hear you'll do—Vance, Curran, here—put it up that way."

Harlan turned to them with a laugh. Since when had Arne and Wiley and a few unknowns took it to themselves to parcel out the county offices? These audacious rebels, without authority, without organization? It was actually humorous!

"We want to trim this crook—Tanner—and an honest district attorney can do it."

Still Harlan was silent. He knew that secretly his father deprecated Thad Tanner. And Jewett, the prosecutor, was not invited to his father's house. Still that did not keep Jewett out of office. His father was a good man. But here was a different good—the fighting good of the new order.

"How about it?" pursued McBride.

Harlan smiled at length, complacently on the labor man. "No, thanks, McBride, I think I'll stick to the law yet a while." He was thinking how funny it would be to tell his father of the trio sitting in the baldly new dining-room of the Metropole plotting against that ancient and honorable thing—Winnetka County politics. It had not been rippled since James G. Blaine.

"You young men are needed," went on McBride; "instead of going off to Canada and the cheap lands, or to the cities, you ought to be right here making your fight. There's big chances—rough knocks and big chances."

"I have mine," retorted Harlan quietly. He was conscious of Wiley's look upon him, appealing, sorrowful—and of Arne's subdued belligerency. They had apparently been talking of him to McBride—the strongest young man in the county!

"See here, we need you"—there was a flash of menace in McBride's tone. "You'll make a name, too, cleaning up that crooked board. Go after your courts, too. They're not right. Here's this man, Lindstrom, they tell me about—gone crazy over religion. The quarryman who lost an arm and then his damage suit against

Tanner on a technicality—and then was sent over on a contempt charge. Why, your court made a criminal right there!"

Wiley saw Harlan's face turn an ugly red. McBride went on: "Here the court wrecks a man over some holier-than-thou tradition of the law. That's the stuff the courts hand out."

Harlan was on his feet. His clenched hand shot across the table near McBride's face. "See here—the judge who made that decision was my father!"

McBride stared back: "Your father?"

"Yes! And no man can speak that way of him!"

There was silence through the begingered and tapestried room. Arne and Wiley sat back. There was nothing else to do between man and man. McBride, the older, the rugged powerful figure; and Harlan with the anger of a young god, fair, handsome, towering over him.

"You take that back!" roared Harlan.

McBride slowly relaxed. He watched the other unceasingly.

"Apologize!"

McBride sat farther back on his chair. A slow smile came to his face as he looked up at the youth.

"Young man, I was raised on a slag pile in Pennsylvania. I never saw the sun shine except Sundays and the time my father was killed, until I was twenty-four, it seems to me. I been hungry so many times in my life that sometimes now it ain't natural to eat. You can't know by any manner of means what that's like. I'm a rough man and I work with rough men, but I know a *man* when I see one. Sit down."

"Apologize!" shouted Harlan.

McBride looked long and grimly at him. "Well," he growled, "if your father raised you to stand up like this with the fighting blood hot in you—I guess I'm wrong. Now, if that's an apology, take it. If it ain't —to hell with you!"

Harlan stood quivering. "Sit down, boy," whispered Wiley. The room was dumb. Even the waiter girls knew who young Van Hart was.

Harlan whirled suddenly to the rack and took his hat. Then he turned to the group at the table. "See here—just now I told you I wouldn't take a nomination for district attorney. Well, just because of this insult, I'll run! Yes—and not on your ticket, either!"

He had started for the office. McBride's cold eye followed him. Then he was on his feet and about the table.

"Shake!" he growled. "I'm with you!"

Harlan stared at him without speaking. Man to man, and something in McBride's eye went through him. "Well," he muttered, "I suppose you didn't mean it against father!" He took the labor leader's hard square palm. "But, damn you, I'll run against you!"

McBride was laughing softly. His eyes were brightening. "Good! But you *can't*—I'm with you!"

Harlan glanced at his wondering friends. "I'm going," he announced, and left the room.

McBride's look was on him until he reached the hotel office. Then he pointed: "The son-of-a-gun! He's payin' for his own dinner!" Then he looked belligerently at Wiley Curran and Arne.

"Mac," put in Wiley, "the squarest chap you ever saw—and the county's best people."

"I know it. My kind of people. Fightin' blood. I'm goin' to support him!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE JINNEE OF THE TAILOR-MADE

MISS VANCE met Harlan one afternoon of mid August. He stopped his saunter across the courtyard lawn to help her hitch her span of fractious colts. She pressed a handkerchief to her flushed face.

"Thank you! You look so awfully cool, Harlan. And clean! You've been driving, too—and look at me!"

His leisurely smile followed her interested glance. It was their first meeting since he had announced his candidacy for the district attorneyship—a brief announcement, coming after an equally brief conference with the party leaders. The outside information was that the Honorable Thaddeus Tanner had selected young Mr. Van Hart as the best and most representative young man of the county to give strength to the old-line ticket against the new progressive league. There was some comment on his youth and lack of experience, but it was regarded as a shrewd move nevertheless of the old court-house ring. County politicians said there would be none to contest young Mr. Van Hart's nomination or election.

Now, Miss Vance looked him over and sighed. "I feel a grudge against you, Harlan! I wish fortune would give you a quarrel now and then. Everything

comes so easily to you. But this is mere envy, isn't it?"

He smiled and walked with her to the *News* office. The sense of his rugged fineness and clean truth gripped her as it must all women.

"Your battle will come after you're elected, Harlan. They—*they* will expect to use you as they do—" she hesitated. She had been about to say "your father", and then knew better. Harlan had the same charm of breeding as his father; but the county ring had kept the judge in office for twenty years; it found its strength among "the best people".

"Nobody owns me, Janet." He found amusement in her caution. "And as for politics, here is Arne, and those other long-horn students, traveling over the county trying to interest the farmers in seed selection. The state board pays their way, but now, really, aren't they out to talk politics for the governor and our eccentric friend, Wiley T. Curran?"

She smiled in turn. She was too practical-minded to be sensitive over the methods by which any movement of party interest was attained. When they reached the *News* door Mr. Curran was standing there, a galley of type in his hand. He waved to the prospect past the town, a spurt of yellow stubble like a flame licking down from the upland corn which was now high.

"I can smell the tassel bloom," murmured Wiley, "and the damp cloddy earth, and hear the rustle of the blades in the breeze off the river. Bless me, I was about to knock off and steal away to the hills, but here you two come, abominably suggesting work. And ambition—and achievement!"

"Indeed we do!" Janet smiled at his whimsical grimace. "And to remind you what the papers said of your speech at the Dallas County fair. 'Brilliant,' 'aggressive,' *'eloquent!'* "

His grimace deepened. Through the weeks Janet had watched his progress. He had astonished every one as a campaigner; "tricky," his opponents said, but winning by his likableness. He had been filled with a boy's delight to discover that he could really speak in public—that his old nervous hesitance had gone like a mist before his new ardors, his mercurial enthusiasms. Out in the other counties he had won dashingly; but among his home people, he confided to Janet, he was a "lame duck".

He could not explain that. She knew it was because here they had seen his purpose, his hope, his imaginative life come to nothing. He was of that type of which the towns and provincial cities have many—a person whose chaste tastes, intellectual aspirations and social qualities had starved under the stress of making a livelihood. Ideas, finer achievement, all bartered with the standards fixed by a vulgar need. Janet herself had felt the impact; she knew his battle. And so long he had given up! And so late had arisen! He seemed to have forgot his useless years, his defeats, he had gone out among men, and they had honored him.

To-day he was in one of his "slumps". Janet went on with her ingenious encouragement. "I wish you knew what a rare mystery you are to the country people. And how splendidly they believe in you! You're a new sort of politician. And I'm very proud, Wiley!"

He still looked ruefully at her. "The fool editor,"

he mourned—"I wonder if I spoke here—as I must sometime—who'd turn out to listen? You and Aunt Abby, and my printer, and doubtless the undertaker." He sighed, and waved his hand out to the town. "Sometimes the old feeling comes back. I don't belong here. I'm the misfit, Janet. The dreamer"—he let his eyes go off to the summer land. It was too rich; never had it hungered, and never from it could arise his epic song—never from this would come the watchers of dawns. "I think, sometimes, even now, that I ought to be a starving poet in a garret. Eh, then, Janet! I'd *do* something!" He came to Harlan with his direct affection and put a hand upon the shoulder of the younger man. "I'd like to be back where you are, boy! And start anew—the slate clean!" He smiled sadly. "What absurdity—*me* a politician!"

He could run on thus with these two,—Janet, with whom he had been schoolmate, and Harlan, whom he had loved after his return. These two had made life livable in his shabby years—*they* had understood. They had made him keep faith with himself. "I need you two," he murmured; "oh, I need you!"

They saw his eyes, the fondness in them, watching out the door. Then he cried out.

Carmichael's bus was at his platform. Two women were getting out. One was a stout light-haired person. The other was Aurelie Lindstrom. She dropped her suit case, and lifting her veil, ran forward to Mr. Curran. And she kissed him!

Mr. Curran colored. He was dumfounded. He gasped. This Aurelie! This being, so mischievous with laughter, so rippling with life, so complete with

happiness, and confident with saucy tricks and clothes and personality!

"Glad to see me, *mon ami!* Yes—no." She was laughing on, chattering her barbarous French. *"Me* —the little savage! Aurelie! Am I changed?"

She turned with an odd foreignness and shrugged, displaying herself for him. And then she saw Miss Vance, and checked herself. Then Harlan, and gasped. But she came to him with the most natural grace and held out a hand.

"And Harlan—glad to see me, are you?" Then to Janet: "And you? I reckon this old town won't know me!" She turned with a little flutter of happiness. Janet decided that Aurelie had discovered herself, a rare trick of making the most of whatever came her way, with a natural player's perception of values. It all enhanced her blithe drollery, this bit of the manners of the world, and she had the wit to utilize it. In no other way could Janet account for the amazingly changed Aurelie. Her lonely pride, her defeated pathos were gone.

She introduced the stranger with a jubilant confidence. "This is Ada Norman, and she was our heavy woman." She sank into Mr. Curran's chair with an air of having done the situation carelessly well. Then she raised her big black eyes limpidly to young Mr. Van Hart, with that belying spiritual pensiveness which must once have so ensnared him. "She knows how to be the coquette," mused Miss Vance—and glanced keenly at Mr. Curran.

Mr. Curran was staring at Aurelie with frank delight. Janet was swiftly aware that his despondency

of the hour had vanished. He was in the clouds, his inescapable romance, the love of the bizarre and the daring, had seized him. "Aurelie, you incredible child!" he cried. "How—how—*splendidly* you look!"

Indeed she did. She knew it. She found happiness in it.

"Mr. Curran," she smiled: "you're the only person—except Uncle Mich—who ever understood me a bit!"

Harlan and Janet were silent. If Aurelie was the vulgarian, this was supposable in her world of vulgarians. Morris Feldman would assure you that the thing was to get the money and the press stuff. He was confident that Miss Lindstrom could do both. And wear clothes. What else was needful?

Wiley saw Harlan's eyes fastened on Aurelie's hand. He knew that Janet also was thinking of the story of Hen McFetridge's diamonds. But Aurelie wore only one little ring! Mr. Curran glanced defiantly at the others. Janet looked at him with a sudden sickness of heart. He was shining-eyed. It took this to delight his vagabond soul—a girl of fluffy clothes, the charm of adventure out in the world, airs and appealing graces, the typical feminine—and he had succumbed.

"Janet!" he cried. "Do you remember her? The little rabbit-hunting savage up in the hills, the defying school child with a heart none could ever find?"

"Nobody ever tried," said the savage with a smile. *"Nobody!"*

"Indeed not," drawled the languid Miss Norman, "unless it's all the babies and beggars. I wonder how many rehearsals she's been fined just for them!"

"It's fun!" burst out Aurelie. "To have some money

and give it away. And to tickle babies—it makes 'em stare so! Miss Norman and I are going to New York and try to get on, but honest, I'd rather have a baby."

Young Mr. Van Hart looked at Mr. Curran. Mr. Curran laughed gracelessly. Miss Vance was beginning to smile. She was concluding that Aurelie was comical. Slangy, droll, good-hearted, honest—but all that spiritual chasteness of her face—when she was not laughing—would be harmless after all!

"New York," went on Aurelie. "If one is going to really act, one must go there. And starve, maybe. But Ada says I won't. She knows we'll get on, and the managers will listen to me. You know they said in Denver it wasn't just my face. They said I was worth while—in the newspapers."

"She certainly is," put in Miss Norman. "I never saw any one work a part so hard—all the tricky bits. And it doesn't seem work with her. And she can wear clothes, and in the business that's *everything!*"

The "heavy woman" looked down at herself. She was quite forty and the stock companies had made her feel it. "An old trouper like me," she went on, "watches a lot of these kids smoke up and go out. But Aurelie, here, is *class*. Where she got it, God knows!"

"When Hen and Ben make another fortune," pursued Aurelie, "they're going to buy the tin opera-house, and I'll come back a leading woman and show these old grannies something!"

Miss Norman laughed wearily. Plainly Hen and Ben were provocative of glee to professional people. "Angel Hen!" she murmured.

"Good old Hen!" said Aurelie. Then, quite inno-

cently, "Mr. Curran, do you know Hen McFetridge wanted to marry me?"

"N-no—" Mr. Curran looked evasively at Harlan. Janet had an impression that Harlan was fighting down a blaze of anger.

"But then," went on Aurelie—"everybody was good to me."

"Wanting to marry you, Aurelie?" faltered Mr. Curran; "do you call *that* being good to you?"

"Of course," demurely, "at least it's interesting."

Harlan was on his feet.. He attempted to pass her, and she looked up in wonder.

"You're not going, Harlan. Why, sit down. Tell me all about yourself. I thought"—she hesitated—"since you'd been East you'd be a great man by now!"

"I'm practising law here," he answered quietly.

"Going to settle down here?"

"Yes."

She looked at him with a pity that stung him. She had grown so amazingly in the year. "I shouldn't think you could stand it. I couldn't. Oh, to be somebody! And do something! I remember the nights I used to climb the hills and stare off across the river and wonder and *wonder!* Out there was something and I *wanted* it. And if Mr. Curran hadn't sent my picture to the paper I'd have been there yet—climbing Eagle Point trail at sunset to watch the light go out—just as lonely as of old."

Some way or other they were still. "And dear Old Mich!" she went on softly. "Done come up-river! Done goin' to occupy the land! That's what *he'd* say. Done goin' to find the land of joy!" She turned to

Wiley suddenly. "And before I go, I'm going to climb the hills once more. And I'm going out to see 'em all, if Papa Lindstrom will let me on the place. I just want somebody whose eyes get brighter when I come among 'em. And Uncle Mich's will, Mr. Curran!"

"I know they will, Aurelie. And Knute's and Peter's and the baby's! And surely all of us! The land of joy? You'll bring it to them out there, Aurelie. You've sent them so much stuff and money—they'd have half-starved last winter, when Albert, the pedler, was sick, if you hadn't done that. John knew you were sending the money, too, but he pretended he did not. Why, we all like you, Aurelie."

"I'm glad," she answered, and stood in the doorway looking over the town with a forgiving and proud simplicity.

"They do like her," drawled the tired blonde woman from her chair. "I've been in stock five years, and before that seven over the Beckmeyer & Grady circuit spot-lighting a song, and I've seen 'em all. When I tie to a kid, she's got to *have* it. Split-week vaudeville and cheap stock don't leave you no illusions. But Aurelie—I'm going to take this kid to New York and get her in right if I have to sell my shoes."

"Are you going there to act?" inquired Mr. Curran innocently.

"Who? *Me?*" The spot-light artist sat up and turned her heavy good-humored face to him. "Oh, Gawd—*me* on Broadway! Say, you're one of these jay humorists, ain't you? Cut out the funny stuff!"

"Now, Ada"—burst forth Aurelie—"you mustn't talk so! You're the best and kindest woman I ever

knew!" She turned defiantly to the others: "Oh, the days and nights she coached me, and rehearsed me—and dressed me—and told me how to behave at hotel tables—and everything! *Mon Dieu!* Each night I say a little prayer for Ada Norman!" She finished softly and was staring out the window. "Maybe this town was right in laughing at me in the old days. I guess I *was* funny! And I felt so bitter when I went away. But sitting here in Mr. Curran's old shop, somehow, all that is dead. The birds singing up the cliff and the smell of the corn and clover—it's all so peaceful. I guess I was wrong—everybody would have been my friend if I'd have let them. And now life is big and beautiful. I almost think people would be glad to see me—I could just love the old place!"

Miss Vance glanced out to where her brother was bringing the buggy across the street. Harlan, in the doorway, was listening. But only Mr. Curran looked at her. If Aurelie had breathed a prayer for forgiveness he could not have stood in more mute reverence. And suddenly Janet turned to see his eyes. Then she crossed to Aurelie and lifting the girl's face, kissed her cheek. She could not tell what compassion, what unutterable renunciation, moved her. Only she knew that to Curran, Aurelie would ever be the princess whom he had released from the witches' spell. This was the secret of his kindling fires, his new and exultant life. For Janet there would be the steadfast work, the long road. She would still the faint dream of a man's love. The other sort of woman, the primal appeal, would win. Well, she did not need this love, then.

She left Aurelie in a shy surprise, and Wiley in wonder at this demonstration. Janet was not given to it. He watched her and Arne drive away, and Harlan cross to the court-house. They were guessing at his madness, it seemed.

Aurelie decided that she and Miss Norman would put up at the Parsons House. She wanted to be seen by Miss Amelia and to order, with her new air of the world, the best room and to comment critically on the sedate Parsons House dinner. The Parsons family had kept the Parsons House and once had entertained Stephen A. Douglas. Miss Amelia kept the tradition as well as the hostelry so that she had the eminent respect, if not the patronage, of the best people.

Harlan, from his office window, looking absently across the Square, saw Miss Norman come out of the *News* door and go down the street toward the Parsons House presently. Then she paused at the corner of the court-house park to glance up at the splendor of the August maples. The birds were singing, and the sunlight flickered through. She crossed the lawn to a seat and sat down. Harlan could see her looking about, drawing in the air perfumed with the bloom of the corn and the golden stubble up the hillsides. Her eyes closed, and after a while she slept—just a tired woman of forty who had worked hard and had no illusions, who was just what the inevitability of work and life makes of all of us. But about the Square, in fifteen minutes, gossip ran. The bleached-hair lady who had come back with Aurelie Lindstrom from her triumphant $100,000 prize beauty tour of the West

wearing the ill-gotten McFetridge diamonds, *was asleep in the park!*

No other woman had ever slept in Rome's park. Nothing could have so jabbed convention, nothing so focused comment on Aurelie Lindstrom. All about the Square, the stores, the billiard parlor, at Playter's corner, at the bank and around the hitching-rails the buzz ran. Harlan heard talk of it from his window. Clerks stopped and told others; farmers stared. Some one asked where was old Marshal Bee; and others said the sheriff's office had jurisdiction as the park was county property.

Wiley Curran, talking to Aurelie in his shop, saw Miss Norman drowsily lurch back under all the mid-summer glory and sleep as a child sleeps.

"Poor Ad!" murmured Aurelie, "she's been tired for ten years and never had such peace and air as this. It's just fine to see her!"

And Aunt Abby, who had hurried down, wiping her floury hands to settle back her "specs" and kiss the wanderer, looked over in the park and said: "Poor dear—let her sleep till supper-time if she will. What else is the park good for except tired people, and maybe heart-sick, too."

But meantime Rome rocked with scandal. Old Marshal Bee was routed from his midday meal and told to do something, and he ambled into the sheriff's office and said *they* ought to do something. Old Deputy Amos pulled his whiskers and protested. The undertaker came in and denounced both of them, and the district attorney was appealed to, but he shook his

head. Never would he wake anybody up just before the primaries!

And while the agitation grew and seethed in the court-house and about the Square, Miss Norman slept. Slept a whole, long beautiful hour, and then awoke slowly, luxuriantly, to stare up at the splendor of the sky through the maples. Afar off came a drowsy cow-bell and the singing of a reaper. She hated to come back to her banal world of grease paint and the hunting of jobs. Just peace—that was what she longed for. But she rubbed her eyes and went over to the Parsons House as Aurelie had directed her.

Aurelie and Mr. Curran were laughing together over old times; and Uncle Michigan, who had been summoned by a small boy, was sitting spellbound listening to Aurelie's adventures, her hand tucked under his own black paw, when Miss Norman came in.

"Well," she drawled with her good humor, "the old dame put me out proper!"

"Old dame? Miss Amelia?"

"I suppose so. Never had such a frost. The old catamaran—*zing!*"

"What's the matter?" cried Aurelie.

"She said," drawled Miss Norman calmly, "that no friend of that Lindstrom girl could get a room in her house. Said it had been a respectable house since 1856. We could take our diamonds and beat it to Earlville. Lord, Aurelie, *our* diamonds!"

Aurelie colored to her ear tips. Her eyes began to blaze. And to damp the kindling fires, Wiley called up Amelia Parsons on the telephone. She declined to ex-

plain. She wouldn't have "them actresses", and that ended it.

Aurelie caught his lamely-repeated phrase. "Them actresses!"

"I wish some of the managers could hear that," went on Miss Norman. "They've told me, now and then, I wasn't actress enough to hurt."

But Aurelie could see no humor in it. "Oh, this town! It always did hate me!" And she burst out of the *News* office to stare at the court-house. "That's just where they sent Papa Lindstrom to jail and made him crazy! And it's just where they laughed when I went to school wearing daisies in my hair. And *no shoes!*"

"Now, dear," protested Aunt Abby, "it's just proud of you!"

"I won't stay here a night!" She came back and threw her arms about Uncle Mich's grizzled head. "We'll go over to Earlville and stay at the Metropole —and take you, Uncle Mich, and Mr. Curran—and everybody that's good to me." She was on the verge of tears. "And the rest—I hate 'em! They say I'm different—and I'm glad I'm different! I hate 'em!"

Uncle Michigan had sat rubbing the brass band of his peg-leg. This radiant Aurelie, his old rabbit-hunting Aurelie? The same child-Aurelie who used to dive among the water-hyacinths in futile chasing of the baby sharks in the south Louisiana bayous? Done come to occupy the land! But now he was more bewildered. "Reckon I'd take you out home, Aurelie, but John he's got so filled with the Holiness spirit. The

Holiness Brethren done turned John hard against the show business."

"We won't stay another minute!" cried Aurelie. "I'll call up the Metropole and have 'em send their taxicab!"

Wiley fell in his chair. Aunt Abby stared. That would be the last word. Aurelie skipping out of town in a taxi. For there was a taxi. Earlville had a taxi. Where there is an Elks' Club in brownstone and a hotel—tapestried dogs in four colors—there must be a taxi. But never had this blatant taxi desecrated the streets of Rome.

"Aurelie!" gasped Mr. Curran. "Take the street-car from the Junction. But the taxi—gee whiz!"

Too late. She flew to the telephone and ordered the taxi.

Miss Norman sat back and settled her skirt under her belt. "Well, she drawled, "I had a nap, anyhow, on the old town. And, seeing that we've put it on the blink, I might just as well light a pill." She took a cigarette out of her bag. "Mr. Curran, this country air gives me a pleasure."

She lighted it. Aunt Abby stared. "I'm a church-member in good standin'!" she cried, and fled through the office and back up to her peach preserves.

Mr. Curran looked wildly across the Square. People were standing about watching the *News* office. Old Marshal Bee was sticking his head out of the undertaker's, and even the prisoners in the basement jail of the court-house were gazing across the lawns. Mr. Curran retreated farther into his shop. Great heavens, here he was entertaining a blonde-haired actress, and

she smoking a cigarette in broad daylight in front of the *News,* too! And he running for congress!

Then up the street that taxi came whoofing, and stopped before the *News.* All the consternation before was as nothing. Business ceased all about the Square. The grocers' clerks stood with jaws hanging and potato measures in their hands. The cook came out of the Gem Restaurant—Chicago Home Cooking—and lawyers and dentists put their heads out of the old stone-slabbed windows; and Vawter, the artist, came down with his camera to get a post-card picture. And all the time the county deputy, Amos, and old Marshal Bee doddered at each other across the Square as to whose jurisdiction should extend to Miss Norman's noonday nap. But when the taxi stopped they stopped also.

"If that-air machine," shouted Deputy Amos, "runs more'n four mile an hour in this town, it air your bounden duty as a city officer to stop 'em!"

"I'll stop 'em," cackled Marshal Bee, "if I can catch 'em!"

Mr. Curran was in despair. "Aurelie, don't go. It makes it worse than ever. Why, people aren't against you! Only some old tabbies—lots of folks are proud of you—they ask me about you!"

Aurelie was pushing Uncle Michigan into the taxi. Miss Norman followed languidly. They had trouble with Uncle Michigan's wooden leg and the chauffeur assisted. "Uncle Mich," whispered Aurelie, "you're just going to surprise 'em. They never thought of *you* and your shiny old leg in an automobile!"

"Done goin' to see the world!" chuckled Uncle

Mich; and Miss Norman patted his hand. "Ain't he the game old sport—leg and all!"

"Oh, Aurelie!" gasped Mr. Curran again. "Tell Miss —er—what's-her-name—to put out that cigarette; I'm running for congress!"

"Well, run along! We ain't going to hurt congress!" She sat up very straight, and then gave the taxi man a dollar. "You just tear around the Square as fast as you can *three times* and then out High Street. And if you get arrested we'll pay your fine. And run over everybody you can except dogs and babies and chickens!"

Young Mr. Van Hart, from his law office windows, heard every word. He saw his mother driving up High Street slowly and dignifiedly as the Van Hart trap was wont to go. And he saw the red taxi start, Aurelie sitting up with her odd foreign air. And Miss Norman with that cigarette, while all the populace of Rome, Iowa, marveled. He stood clutching the window shade and groaned. "Aurelie! And I loved you, Aurelie!"

He heard the taxi go whoofing by. Then he heard Old Dutch snort as his mother's trap turned out of High Street. He looked out and then dashed down-stairs. When he reached the corner the taxi was making its second lap, and his mother was speaking calmly to the backing horse. Harlan ran to seize Old Dutch's bit. And then the taxi went past them hurling the corner dust clear into Dickinson's vegetable boxes. People simply waited. Even the dogs gaped mutely. Neither to right nor left did Aurelie glance. Old bootlegger Mich sat still between her and this cheerful woman with the cigarette. Then the taxi, with a final

derisive snarl, made its last circuit of the Square and shot out High Street. Old Dutch flew up on his hind legs, while a tall, dignified young man stood pulling him down in the whirl of dust and leaves kicked by the taxi all over his immaculate summer suit.

Mrs. Van Hart looked calmly after the taxi. "Harlan, wasn't that Aurelie Lindstrom?"

"It was, mother," he answered quietly.

Across the Square, old Deputy Amos was hurrying. "Hey, Marshal—why don't you stop 'em?"

"I would," retorted Marshal Bee, "if I could catch 'em!"

In the taxi Miss Norman patted Uncle Michigan's hand. "I think," she murmured, "the old town will remember Aurelie!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE BACKWARD TRAIL

HARLAN did not know what haunting of loneliness took him the next evening to the hills. It was the first day of September, and already a veil of haze lay in the wooded little valleys, and the far slopes had the first bronze of the ripening corn. Yet it was summer, with a harvest moon drawing up across the river, round and full and golden.

He wandered down old trails from Eagle Point. Northward along the bluff were glimpses of the distant Mississippi over the sycamores and willow sloughs. He crossed the last glade to the ridge over which was Tanner's quarry. Already through the laurel and maples and young elms a patch of the white sheer rock arose. And on this point he stopped to look down in the valley. From the quarry bed the road ran on winding past the fringy corn patches of the Pocket squatters. But all the unloveliness of their meager homes was hidden in the shadow, and all the beauty of the hill beyond lay revealed by the moon. Harlan had not been on the back trail for more than a year. When he came to the old familiar rock jutting over the cliff he started to climb the last step and then paused. Some one was before him, sitting where he had intended to sit, look-

ing as he had wished to look out over the valley and the town.

And before he came out of the shadow he knew it was Aurelie. Aurelie, who could not leave without one visit to the home trail. She had not been to Lindstrom's house, but to-night she had ridden over from Earlville, tied the livery mount at the Sinsinawa Creek bridge, and clambered up to where she could look either way, to the village or to her foster-father's place below the quarry. Harlan watched her long. She was mute, dry-eyed, very still; but when, at length, he came out and stood before her, curiously she did not start.

She moved slowly and looked up at him. Her face had all that grave purity of outline that belied alike her temper and her humor.

"It just seems," she murmured, "as if I was to find you here."

He remembered now that she said she was coming to the hills. "But I never thought of it, Aurelie. And yet—"

He stopped and she sat forward to see his face. "Yet you came. Oh, the moonlight made *me* come, Harlan! I was restless and—unhappy—and I remembered such beautiful nights here. Oh, very wonderful! September—like this." She moved over with a little friendly gesture. "Sit down."

But he stood with his hand out to the lichened rock above her.

She did not seem to notice his constraint. "When I was a little ragged kiddie, I used to climb up here. Always I loved it, Harlan."

"But I tell you," he answered quietly, "you came to-night because you remembered something else, Aurelie."

"Yes," she answered simply. "Our nights. I couldn't quite forget the last one. The night you took me to your mother's, Harlan." She laughed briefly. "And she tricked me—and I ran away. I saw so clearly. I just woke up that night, Harlan."

"She didn't trick you, Aurelie. Mother couldn't—"

"Oh, well!" she smiled wisely. "If you could realize how I've changed! That night I was breathless before her. She appealed to me—she wanted me to let you go—to help you, Harlan. I thought it was fine that night—but I tell you I *paid!* I did love you, Harlan."

He watched her face in the moonlight. "Mother did *something,* I knew. I wasn't sure; but that wasn't what hurt, Aurelie. It was afterward—your going on the stage—in that way. Everything—hurt."

She made a blithe pretense at a grimace of mockery. "Oh, well—boy! It's all different with you and me. I was a weak and silly girl to hang on you and love you, and confuse you into thinking that you *loved* me! And that night I saw all the girls of your set and the dancing and the music—it all rushed over me—the difference." She smiled with a tender mystery she could not deny—he was amazed to find how immeasurably older she could be in her womanhood—"I knew you'd forget if I made you. And it seemed fine if I could make you." She smiled on bravely. "And I'm glad. We both ought to be glad. My!"—she was laughing now. "We were both kids, weren't we? Now I know the world a bit—I'm a heap different. Done growed

up, Uncle Mich says, and *he's* scared about it! I'm going to be a real leading lady sometime, and come back and play in the tin opera-house—play in a piece that hasn't so much shooting in it—and you'll be fat and prosperous and married and bring your kiddies to see me. And you'll be mighty glad, Harlan, you never married that Cajun girl from down-river."

But he would not smile. In the moonlight on the hillside, she had the same defying gipsy charm as of old; wilful, mocking, humble, buoyant, when she wished it. All the inevitable vulgarian stamp of her upbringing was vanished; and he felt the old pathos for her—that what was dear and simple in her he could find and save and make his own. The rest would not matter. He could not fathom how the invincible heritage of his family, was now shamed before her gay proud honesty, the sense of woodland freedom from all the conventions of his sort. He wanted to be as honest as she, as fearless as she, but he did not know the way.

"Aurelie," he muttered, "be still. You know I love you."

She was very still. The shadow of the rock was not more mute. Only her face was turned, evading him, a pretense of unhearing.

"I tell you so again, Aurelie. It costs a lot. I bucked through school and forgot you—almost. I came back here and set my teeth together and worked. And all the things they said about you—this town never *will* get over talking about you—all this miserable notoriety —it hurt. I said nothing. But I knew I loved you, for all the talk hurt—*hurt!* I didn't want you to go on in this miserable, cheap show business. There was so

much to do—to make of ourselves—before we—before it would be right for us to marry."

It was badly put to such as Aurelie. "Oh, a girl doesn't want a lover who thinks of what there is to do, or make of her before he marries her. That's what you mean, of course!" She blurted on, checking her hot tears. "I don't care! I came back here yesterday—perfectly happy! And the way this awful town treated me!"

"Aurelie?" he said sternly, white with a battle to be the master; forever this desire to shelter her and teach her mingled with his passion. "You do so many *things!* Racing around the Square yesterday in that machine. And you ought not to have kissed Wiley Curran!"

"Why not?" She looked up innocently. "I felt happy—and he was so glad to see me."

He sighed with discouragement. "And then there's that story—Aurelie, did Hen McFetridge give you any diamonds?"

"Yes. A tiny one—" She held out her hand with naive pride. "And he said he'd have given me lots more if he'd sold more oil stock."

Harlan forced back a smile. Harvard and two hundred years of his father's culture had no answer to this. "I ought to be angry," he muttered.

She was regarding him with her old puzzled air of respect. "I reckon," she went on, "that friends can give one presents if they want to!" She sighed pensively. "You're funny people—you and your mother and everybody. I never can understand. And so I want to go away and be a great actress, and sometime come

back here again with lots of clothes and a bulldog on a chain—"

"Aurelie!"

"A bulldog and a press-agent—"

"Oh, Aurelie! I'd rather have you back again—the little wild-woods girl—Uncle Mich's girl—and not a prize beauty and an actress—not a bit!"

He had reached to take her hands, and with them drew himself down beside her. She laughed blithely: "Harlan, I'm a heap prettier than I used to be, ain't I?"

"Not 'ain't I', Aurelie!"

"Well, then—something else! Prettier, and with clothes—you ought to love me a heap more, Harlan, if I amount to something."

"But I don't want you to amount to anything!" His arm slipped down about her slenderness, he tried to shake her angrily; and then, with a great passionate pity, he swept her up in his arms in the old way—her breath upon his lips, the quiver of her warm flesh against his own. He was no more the boy; a new man's madness to possess her beat on him. It overbore his control, his heritage. It was not so that his father had loved—loved with this young lust of triumph, this barbaric holding of poignant life and the beauty that was in her. A flame, a plaything—whatever it was he held Aurelie, it was sweet to know she was lying in his arms, still and content. "If you knew how I *cared!* I haven't any law or morals with you—it's just you—and I want you to stay. You shall stay, Aurelie—by God, I shan't have you go away to be cheapened and ground up in the cities with all that life you'll lead! No—no!"

She looked up from his kisses. "If I stay, you'll marry me?"

"Yes, dear—a thousand times!"

"That's like you and old times, Harlan! But to live here in Rome—oh, they wouldn't have us!"

"I'll make them have us!" He cried it fiercely to the town below them in the dusky light.

"Mr. Curran said you could be district attorney next year. And that you were getting on fine. Oh, you'll have to give that all up, Harlan!"

He was still. Then he muttered: "But I love you, dear!"

"I know. But your mother—and what they all *think* of me! I never knew until yesterday how *bad* they thought!"

"You'll stay and make your place, dear. It'll be the big brave way. Oh, we were right before! The night seemed big and generous, didn't it, dear? And then we let it go. Oh, we were right—and all the world was wrong!"

She drew his head to her and kissed him, a soft humbleness in her eyes. Then she sat up and put his arm gently aside and looked down long at the valley. Somehow she could not quite forget. A strange idea that she had exchanged places with Harlan grew in her. Their last night in the hills it had been she who was burning with this wild passion, this splendor of love that considered nothing in all their lives but love. And *he* had been the mentor, his cool sane blood that had saved them and held them pure.

And now, slowly, with her sense of the bigness of his love, grew the sense of his unrealized sacrifice. It

seemed as if the long unequal years while he was fighting down the handicap, winning his place despite her lacking—she, who had even no name except what Lindstrom had given her, no parentage save what a disreputable whisky pedler chose to tell of her; who was now the town's daughter of evil—the roll unfolded to her, and she was curiously shaken, groping amid hazards, yet cool with purpose.

"I want you to stay," he pleaded, "just to show these people how I love you, Aurelie. Why, we can laugh at it all together!"

She looked at him strangely still for a time. "No. We can't. Not *always*. Your father spent a fortune on your education. And all his life, and your mother's is centered on making you a career. I know it. Why, all the county sort of feels that! It's curious how things come to me afterward. I can't blame 'em a bit. Somehow, it's all sweet to me, Harlan. It's very fine, dear! Just as if I was away off and could look at both of us—and could smile and say *'No!'*"

"No?"

"Maybe I don't care enough for you any more!"

"Aurelie!"

"We're not children any more." She looked at him again, subduing the tenderness of her smile. He reached a hand to touch her, and with her Indian quickness she evaded him. He followed a step on the trail as she retreated. "I'm Old Mich's girl, still. I'm not educated, and I've heaps of manners to learn, and lots of ways that hurt you—and oh, *how* they'd hurt you sometime if we were married! I *know!* It's just as your mother said."

"Aurelie!" he cried again and followed her.

"Don't you come! Harlan, I'd have to give all the new life up—and I wouldn't give it up. I've been happy—splendidly happy—working. I wouldn't give anything up—for *you!*"

He stood staring after her as she slipped away. He started again to follow, and she laughed a warning in the dusk of the laureled trail.

"I just been thinking—and I don't *love* you!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SENTIMENTALIST

TWO weeks before the September primary election, Mr. Curran noted a curious reserved respect toward him from men of the town who had long ignored him as a mere disturber. And Arne Vance, coming in from a last tour of the county on his "pigs and politics" campaign, grimly explained it.

"The Honorable James Hall came home to work over his district, as the old crowd desired. And he got a frost, Wiley! He knows it—they all know it. They're scared. Tom Purcell and I have been comparing notes. We've showed Hall up something fierce on his votes in congress, and the farmers were glum to the Honorable Jim. And he never had a show with the new element—the foreigners in Earlville's new factory district. Hall's licked! Thad Tanner knows it. Judge Van Hart knows it! But"—he looked grimly at the candidate—"we want to cinch the fight. We need some money for printing and stuff. Got any?"

Mr. Curran smiled. "Good lord, Arne! I'm bled dry as a bone! I tried to get some more on a mortgage at the bank. Cal Rice rubbed his hands and said, 'Wait till after election'. I don't know whether he's trying to scare me with a threat of foreclosure on the

Vance or wants to conciliate me in case I'm elected." He glanced at Janet ruefully. "But money? Our crowd has no money. Money be damned! I'm simply going on telling men that I'm Wiley Curran and I want them to vote for me—and *why!*"

The farmer-student went away dissatisfied. The candidate was in Miss Vance's office. He had been there an hour talking lightly of affairs but conscious of some rift in the old intimacy. Janet had been reserved, impersonal, businesslike. She looked thoughtfully at him now.

"Wiley, you must have money. It's the crisis of your campaign. Arne's right. You're winning splendidly. The state press is noticing your fight down here. I should almost say the country is, for Hall is a national figure. It's splendid!"

It was the first touch of her old enthusiasm for his success. For his success was in the air. There was a sense of change, an undercurrent of panic on one side, of vivifying unity on the other. Men were talking of new issues, new figures—the control of a commonwealth was being wrested from accustomed hands, and the obscure group of malcontents in Winnetka county were acute with this feeling of being on the crest of a wave. The radical papers had taken up Arne Vance's phrase of a "pigs and politics" campaign among the farmers; it had undoubtedly caught the popular humor.

Curran nodded buoyantly. His constraint vanished with Janet's. Yet his intuition told him of a change in her. She sat forward now and spoke as one turning to a definite point of business. "Wiley, you need

money. And I have it idle in the bank. I want you to use it."

He stared at her. A flush came to his face. "Janet?"

"You can give me your note."

"I could write a bushel of them—but who'd take them?"

"I will—for five hundred dollars."

"It wouldn't be worth a cent at the bank!"

"Doubtless not. But to me—" She looked away seriously. Then, with hot impulse breaking through, "Oh, Wiley, I want you to win—*win!*" She swept up his hand from the table. "Your big chance, and I want to help!"

He was silent. Then muttered: "Janet, I can't take your money! I—I'm not worth it, girl. God bless you—I'd not feel right. I—our friendship so beautiful—so big a thing—" he would not finish. A damning sense of recreance was on him. She loved him, and he had never been able to make such a disaster of himself that she would not love him. That was the wonderful thing about women! And Janet, with her great wide horizons, to love him! Her steady, all-forgiving faith in him; Janet the confidant of men like Governor Delroy, the leaders of new ideals. Janet, whose work was ever calling her to finer achievements. She had refused advancement, she had waited—for him! No, he would say no more. A man had best stumble on in his own fashion.

"I'm sorry." She looked away impersonally. "I only meant it for the common good,—the new democracy we're fighting for. Just that—you are one of the leaders now—one of the coming men—I'd hoped."

Her voice had died low. Then she went on in her business tone. "Go see Purcell to-day, will you, Wiley?"

Within the hour she called up the Honorable T. P. Purcell, Mr. Curran's political manager, and told him her check for five hundred dollars was to his credit in an Earlville bank. The candidate was not to be apprised at present. Young Mr. Purcell was too pleased to dissent; he leaned much on Miss Vance.

Mr. Curran walked to the Junction and took the interurban to Earlville that afternoon with the firmest intention to see his political manager at once. But he went into the Hotel Metropole with a director of the stone and contracting company which had been so disgruntled over the Tanner company's monopoly of county work and was, therefore, for reform and revolution. And after this conference he suddenly remembered Aurelie. He had been assuring himself that he didn't know she was under the same roof, but this was futile.

"I suppose she's leaving to-night," he mused, "and I ought to call up—why, of course I had! To let the little girl go away in this fashion would be a shame. Besides"—he reflected upon other reasons—"well, I must see after Aurelie." So, feeling rather brotherly-fatherly, and altogether equal to the matter, he inquired. And the burst of joy over the room telephone made him queerly giddy. See him? Why, come right up!

Miss Lindstrom was packing and entertaining Morris Feldman, of the Majestic Theater, who was sitting on her trunk, impressive, prophetic and prepared to assume the glory of her burst on the world.

"Ain't I as good looking as I used to be?"

"I'll give you a letter, Miss Lindstrom, to Cohan & Snitz, who put over all them big music shows in New York. Believe me"—Mr. Feldman laid a fat diamonded hand over his fat chest—"you got to show Cohan & Snitz, Miss Lindstrom. This here Chicago beauty bunk, that don't go in New York, Miss Lindstrom."

"Ain't I just as good-looking as I used to be, Mr. Feldman?"

"Forty ways for Sunday, Miss Lindstrom. You look the part now, with them clothes—and I'm glad you took my advice and put your salary in clothes. It's all the business, Miss Lindstrom. It don't go much with Snitz, but Cohan he falls for that. Cohan he knows the goods when he sees 'em. When it comes to girls he likes the big rangy lookers that he can hang lots of stuff on for his finales, but you'll do, if you are little. There's something about you"—Morris rolled his eyes amiably—"well, I can put you right with Cohan, believe me, Miss Lindstrom. There ain't any one except Max Levitan up in Chicago that can put a girl into New York, like me, Miss Lindstrom."

"That's good," commented Miss Lindstrom, "but will you get off my trunk?—and hold that lid back, too, while I stuff this stuff in."

Mr. Feldman did so. "Where you made your mistake, Miss Lindstrom, was hooking up with these two big blobs from Tulare, California. And that newspaperman's show, believe me, was one mistake. It took the edge off this here beauty bunk. If I'd been handling you, Miss Lindstrom, they'd been naming cigarettes after you by now."

"You're awful good, Mr. Feldman. And I'll be mighty glad to get that letter. Me and Miss Norman —I mean Miss Norman and *I*—will be pleased." She was rolling up five pairs of stockings and stuffing them into the crown of a hat. "You see, Mr. Feldman, I'm trying to improve my grammar, but believe me, it's some effort. I'd rather hunt rabbits—or jobs. I guess my grammar'd hit 'em pretty hard in New York."

"My letter'll put you right. There ain't many people wise to this here theatrical business, Miss Lindstrom. In New York there's Cohan & Snitz and Gus Friedlander, and in Chicago there's Max Levitan, and then here's me that runs this picture house for Hirsch & Meyerstein. But it's too much for most of 'em, Miss Lindstrom. There's a great future for the American drama and the American actress, Miss Lindstrom. 'Get the money—Get the money—Get the money—' that's the way I heard Cohan put it up to Snitz when I come out ahead of *The Girl and the Duke* for 'em one time. Believe me, you can make good, Miss Lindstrom."

"Climb on that trunk with both feet," commanded Miss Lindstrom; and the protagonist of the American drama did so. "Now run along—I want to change my skirt—" pursued Miss Lindstrom. "And, oh—there's Mr. Curran!"

She dashed to him as Mr. Feldman ambled out. She seized Mr. Curran's hands. "Do you know, somebody said I shouldn't have kissed you the other day?"

"I know," faltered Mr. Curran.

"Why not?"

"Well—er—I'm running for congress."

"Well, I wasn't a-going to kiss congress! But you know I think a heap of you. I never can repay all you did for me, Mr. Curran. Why, I remember that I began to use better grammar after that time I ran off through the woods and you comforted me. Why, you made me cry—and just there I made up my mind to be *somebody!* Do you remember, Mr. Curran?"

Poor old Wiley! He had not forgotten a moonbeam on the trees! And never would! That was his weakness. Congress would not stick in his mind over night, try as he would.

"Well," Aurelie went on, shaking out things and laying them in her suit case, "when I come back with a bulldog—a great actress—I'll step out and tell all the people—right in front of that fuzzy old curtain at the tin opera-house—that Mr. Curran of the *News,* he did it!"

"Then Aurelie," he mourned, "I couldn't be elected pound-master! They're terribly afraid of actresses over in Rome."

"They never had any! But I don't suppose they'll ever forget that I was a shanty-boat girl and came up the river with an old soldier who did the whisky loup from Natchez to Dubuque; and ran wild in the woods and hadn't any mother to speak of"—she jerked things about in the case—"and any name except one that an Indian woman gave me, and what Papa Lindstrom had. I'm just not *anybody*—" she jerked the case again and grimaced. "Now, I cut my finger!"

"It's what people do who get mad and slam things."

"If I had *anybody,* they'd kiss my fingers when I cut 'em!"

Mr. Curran took that finger. He looked at it and kissed it gently. Then he looked up to see the tears and laughter in her eyes.

"I'm glad you're foolish!" she cried, and he whispered:

"So am I!"

"I guess we're a good deal like each other."

"I'm afraid so! You're a problem, Aurelie. No wonder Harlan couldn't make anything out of you. He's all broken up, poor chap!"

"Why can't you be sorry for me a little bit? I sent Harlan away, Mr. Curran! I wasn't going to hurt his career. I'm going to be somebody myself. Be a new woman like Miss Vance, and write pieces for the papers; and not bother about a home and some babies like I want!"

"Aurelie, I can't understand you."

She sat on the trunk and sighed. "That's on top. Down in my heart I want to run away down-river with Uncle Mich and to the Cajun country where we went to the island balls and I wore hyacinths in my hair—I do, Mr. Curran!"

"Lord bless you!" cried Mr. Curran; "you love Harlan!"

"No, I don't. But I want to be loved by somebody just like I am—a sort of wandery person who'd be willing to go off on adventures. And not have any people or careers. Just be brave and foolish, like you."

Mr. Curran contemplated her quite calmly. "Aurelie," he demanded, "are you going ever to marry Harlan?"

"Never, never—never! It was only because I was

lonely, and a sentimentalist—is that it? It was such a great thing that summer. But now? Why I have theater managers come and help me roll stockings and stick 'em in my trunk! Mr. Feldman just did!"

"Aurelie," went on Mr. Curran steadily and sternly, "about Harlan—you're making a great mistake if you throw him off!"

She regarded him demurely through half-closed limpid eyes.

"Some people I know wouldn't be sorry if I did!"

Aurelie was plainly playing with poor Mr. Curran. He felt it and was enraged. "If you weren't so grown up, I'd spank you! You—a young lady!"

"I'm not. Ask Harlan's mother or some of the Shakespeare Club. I'm vulgar and *nobody*—just Old Michigan's girl!"

Mr. Curran sat despairingly down. Never to him had she been so beautifully buoyant, so arch with joy, so infinite with possibilities, so gay with blithe courage. Love Harlan? Surely not! This was *life* she was loving—smiles and tears and triumphs—she was enraptured with it all, and she would love no one now! She was finding herself; she was unfolding splendidly, dangerously, out of the hard and meager years she had served.

"John says the reason he won't let the family have your presents is because you're a contrivance of the devil!"

"But you like the devil's contrivances, don't you, Mr. Curran?"

"I expect I do, Aurelie."

"And you don't care a hang what congress thinks!"

"I'm afraid not, Aurelie."

She came with laughter to him—and kissed him. "Nobody can *see* us! What's the use of hating anybody? Or being sorry? Or pining because they don't love you? Oh, let's just go on and be fine with every one! I'm trying to be religious. I say prayers when I ain't too sleepy. And I'm collecting Madonna heads, and I give dimes to all the beggars. Ada says it's silly to cross the street to give dimes to people, but I tell her it's religious!"

"Somehow," he muttered, "I have to forgive you. Do you know you are *living*, Aurelie, every day? That's what it means—to be gay and happy and kind, and not bother too much about other things." He took her hands: "Dear girl, life isn't so much winning anything as always trying. It's better to travel than to arrive, as some one said. And oh, so many years I stood still—until *you* came, Aurelie! I can't exactly explain it—you can't imagine how you helped me!"

She looked at him wide-eyed. "Helped you?"

"I knew you wouldn't," he went on despairingly.

She was still for a time. "I wish I could understand! It's fine to know you. I never used to feel so hopeless after I met you. You made me happy because you saw something in me—I wasn't just common to you." He looked up to see some grateful shining in her eyes—"And the funny old town—we were both rebels, weren't we? And just suppose you *did* go to congress, and I became a *real* actress!" She stood by the window and stared out across the busy street to where, even in Earlville, one saw the encircling hills.

"What, then, Aurelie?"

"Why, we'd both remember how we helped each other!"

He went away with a surge of his heart he could not still. "Now write me every week," she had said. "Nice friendly letters—and not fatherly-advice letters as if you were baldheaded, Mr. Curran!"

When he had gone home, he climbed Eagle Point trail before he could sleep. And he did a curious thing for a possible member of congress; he kissed his fingers toward the eastern hills and whispered:

"Because you're there, Aurelie—just because you're there!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE WAY OF HIS CASTE

THE day after the autumn primaries, state politics was conscious of a distinct shock. The "Insurgent" governor had triumphed again, but that was expected. But what at once was the sensation, attracting even national attention, was the defeat of James S. Hall, chairman of the most powerful committee in congress, confidant of the president—beaten in his home constituency, the sober cautious counties of the Iowa Reserve, by an obscure country editor!

The press buzzed with explanations. It marked the temper of the rural West; it meant the downfall of traditional control; it was revolutionary, demagogic. Curran was a socialist, anarchist, freethinker, what not! Nobody knew exactly. Down in his home county folk said: "Well, we always did sort of like Wiley Curran out our way." In the other precincts of the district they said: "That editor put up a slashing fight —he come over here and give us *facts!*"

Anyhow, Curran was the regular-party nominee. In Rome the best people could not have been more indignant if one of the billiard-hall idlers had gone into the First National Bank and deliberately kicked Cal Rice on the shins. It was rumored that Thaddeus Tanner, county chairman, who had complacently promised his

bailiwick against the governor's league, was enraged beyond reason. He swore he would not support Curran; the old-line men would vote for the democratic candidate, whoever that spindling county organization put up, even if it was a yellow dog.

The county talked so much of Curran's spectacular victory that it forgot the local ticket. But all the old-line county officers were nominated—a Tanner slate clean. Young Mr. Van Hart, nominated without opposition, was the only new face to be in the Rome courthouse. Every one approved of young Mr. Van Hart, a quiet, reserved, altogether likable chap—he would have no opponent from the other party camp.

The Honorable Thaddeus Tanner met young Mr. Van Hart the day after the primary.

"Well, young man, what the devil did you mean by allowing this crazy anarchist to beat your father's old friend for congress?"

"I had nothing to do with Mr. Hall's fight, Mr. Tanner."

The county boss bared his yellow teeth and snorted. "That's what they all say. It's these young fellers did it—fellers like them cow-college students whom Jake Vance and Purcell sent into every district to work for Curran. And these damned labor people over in Earlville—but I notice they all voted for you, Harlan; this McBride, hey?—and his cattle!"

"Conditions are changing."

The boss eyed his nominee with a shrewd doubt. "Young man, did your father ever talk much to you?"

"Father has no use for politics. He'd hardly presume to influence me."

Thad snorted again. These Van Harts always did irritate him with their ideas of the proper thing. Still they were useful, because their ideas of the proper thing did not allow them to oppose him either.

"Well, Harlan, I hope you understand you didn't even have to make a fight. People knew your dad—and they could just figure on you. It's a good thing you're our man."

Mr. Van Hart smiled impersonally. "I am not your man."

The county boss stared at him. Then he bit the end off a cigar. Then he spat on the sidewalk against the ordinances made and provided. "Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun!" he murmured. "Curious I never stopped to talk with you before!" Then he rubbed his gold-headed cane against Harlan's sleeve. "Young man, you're mighty young—you'll get over this."

But the Honorable Thaddeus Tanner sidled into Judge Van Hart's chambers, after court that day, and had a talk of a number of things, but mostly of Harlan and what a brilliant career *he* had opened for Harlan. And the next day the Earlville *Mercury-Journal* —controlled through the stock which Cal Rice's wife owned in it—came out with a fulsome forecast of young Mr. Van Hart's career.

Harlan met Arne Vance reading that column to his sister when he left the office that night. The farmer-student fixed his black eyes on the nominee. "Trying to rope and brand you, eh? See here—Mike McBride and I supposed *we* had something to do with your big vote."

Harlan smiled. "I think so, Arne. You surely put Wiley over!"

Arne grimaced, nodding his head toward Janet. "I know," continued Harlan. "Every one says *she* did it!" He put out his hand to Janet in the buggy. She appeared tired and distrait. "It has been a strain, hasn't it? But Wiley—it'll be the making of him, Janet."

She smiled a rare gratefulness. "He can't fail of election now. Only"—she paused and Harlan lifted his serious eyes to hers, "I have sort of a *feeling,* Harlan, he—he'll do some of the erratic audacious things that have always wrecked him!"

"Like taking up the cause of these Pocket squatters whom the county is going to evict for the new creek dam—Lindstrom—" muttered Arne. "Did you see the *News?* He's already pleading some right of theirs."

Janet looked away. "Well, I hope—I trust—but it's like Wiley!" Then she smiled upon them. "Well, I *am* tired out. I'm going away."

"Away?" Harlan's tone lifted. "To rest?"

"To work. I feel as if—well, my work was done here, Harlan. And I have chances. To speak, to write—well, for all the fine things we used to discuss in the old *News* office, you remember. The child-labor laws—the women's movement—my old ambitions, Harlan."

He nodded sympathetically. Then muttered: "But your place here—it's hard to fill, Janet. The school system you've made a model for the state!" Then he

was silent. Janet was thinking of the long years' fight. And the best people had not been with her until of late. She was too practical, too busily efficient, to be about the Shakespeare Club teas at Mrs. Van Hart's. Harlan sharply differentiated her from the tabby affairs of High Street.

He told his mother that night that Janet Vance would resign her next term and go East. The lady elevated her brows wisely. The teas had heard something of the kind. "I suppose that will end the affair between her and Mr. Curran."

"The affair" was a matter of years' gossip. Harlan said nothing; he had never, after a man's fashion, bothered his head about it.

"I imagine it's true, then, that that Lindstrom girl has come between them."

He looked attentively at her with a trace of suspicion of her subtlety. Aurelie's name had never been mentioned between them except in the lady's amiable satire on her "career". But that was common to the town. And Harlan had never looked upon Aurelie's appeal to the erratic romanticism in Mr. Curran in that light. It seemed preposterous. Mrs. Van Hart went on with the cool impersonality, humanized by her sense of amusement, with which she looked on the affairs of her neighbors, even the ladies bemused in the Shakespeare afternoons: "I think it would be quite fit. Those two—Mr. Curran in congress!—and imagine a person who goes along High Street whistling to all the dogs on his way to the post-office, in his shirt-sleeves, in James Hall's seat!"

Harlan looked at her in imperturbable silence. The

judge smoked his dinner cigar with his deprecating assent.

"His nomination, my dear, is more than amusing. He—and all the rabble of demagogism—take it as an indorsement by the people of the rant that is subverting our political theory. Our public men, our financiers, persistently yelped at by Curran's sheet, and our sober constituency applaud!" He looked mildly over his glasses. "My boy, I wish you had stayed out of it all!"

"I do not!" The mother was incisive. "It is time he was in the battle. It is the parting of the ways, and there is enough common sense in the county to make Harlan's career. It is the day of the young men."

And to Harlan's mind there came the memory of a phrase. A vision—Arne Vance and the tramp of his young men up the hill. He became conscious of a conflict within him here in the dear familiar home. Here were his people—the best people, ever clinging to fixed forms, righteous, worthy, leisurely developing but needing inherent privilege—this was the good. But here was another good out in the world; a new, hungry, lustful good, eager to seize, to make place, to break down forms and privilege—this was the eternal battle. There was no ground under a man's feet—he was with one or with the other. And slowly it came to him that, in the eyes of his parents, the eyes of his world—a world rigid with caste, resistant with ideals, however much it might assent to the babble of democracy—Aurelie was the symbol of the lower standards. It was for him to choose, and his love was the crux of it all, a sign-post at the parting of the ways. He might fight to win her, try to bear her from the vulgar and

common mode, but his social sense told him exactly what that would mean to his people, the "best people" who, with a Nietzschean ruthlessness, must set their faces against the trampling onward marching forces that would level or destroy.

Even now his mother touched on the heart of it. "I see that Mr. Curran's *News* is insisting that the county, or the benefited landholders, should pay those squatters in the Pocket whose patches will be flooded by the new dam. He insists they have a *moral* title to that no-man's land."

"And acting on that anarchistic theory," went on the judge amiably, "Lindstrom drove away the workmen whom the contractor sent there. I call that an excellent example—Curran does not hesitate to put the law aside in his cryings for what he terms justice. To announce outlawry."

"If Lindstrom is an outlaw, father," Harlan said quietly, "the law made him one."

The judge looked up. He reddened. Nothing in his kindly life, his righteous world, hurt as did the gossip that he had crushed Lindstrom's manhood. And his son spoke as one who had brushed aside glib phrases and easy precedents and had stared at the soul of the man crushed. The judge frowned, to forbid discussion. "The law can not take account of a man's degeneration under punishment. But you, my son? You are going into office as a public prosecutor—where did you get these ideas?"

"Thinking. A fellow can't help it. And the new things, father—the spirit of inquiry, fearless, reasoning, weighing values—"

The judge had shaken his head. It always annoyed him to have to consider that it was not enough to be virtuous. It was comfortable to believe that everything was honest, decent, wholesome, God-fearing and conformable to the constitution—everything except the men who passed before him at the bench. They were another order of beings; he deprecated their existence, and sent them to jail. When Harlan had gone up-town the father sighed. It was well enough to sit behind the impersonality of the law, but the one-armed quarryman standing guard over his wretched patch against all society, mute, imbruted, hostile! Men had talked of it: "Judge Van Hart sent him to jail two years ago and he's hardly spoken to a soul since; just kept to his shanty, took his children out of school and become a sort of religious fanatic and anarchist."

The judge spoke to his wife at bedtime. "My dear, do you suppose that extraordinary affair he had with that girl two years ago had anything to do with it?"

"With *it?*" She looked up in surprise. "Lindstrom?"

"Yes. The girl has been back, you know, and is—I'm told—extraordinarily pretty."

The lady sniffed. "I told you how she nearly upset my trap!"

"But Harlan—"

"Harlan did not glance at her—her scandalous behavior around the Square! The dust of that machine was thrown in every one's face! And that *affair*—a mere boy's infatuation—for a month. And her career since—the impossible stories they tell of her! As if it were *possible* with Harlan!" She had a Roman ma-

tron's pride in this square-jawed serious son. A century of American democracy was needed for him, the sober sturdy sort of which they had sprung.

The judge sighed again. "Somehow, he has never been quite the same to me since—he has seemed to look at us now and then so measuringly—and there has been something almost abnormal in his desire for work—as if he were trying to forget!"

Harlan was in his office two hours on that same indomitable application. At eight he closed the desk and went across to Wiley's shop, for a light was there, and he felt like bantering the editor as in the old days. It would be a relief after the curious sense of strain he had come to feel at home. Yet he could not bring back exactly the old open comradeship with Wiley; and that, also, was curious. He had felt oddly alone, conscious as he was of a furtive and friendly interest in him. When he dropped in the court-house the other candidates were cordial, but there was a hushing of conversation. He began to "mix with the county crowd", as he said, under an idea that it was what a young man, and the only new face on the ticket, should do. But somehow he was treated with respect and passed by in the chaffing fellowship of the local politicians.

He spoke of it to Curran as they sat in the dusk. Curran was complacently at ease since his triumph; he had discovered a pleasant vanity in this new regard of men. "Perhaps," he suggested, "they're rather afraid of you, Harlan. You've laid aside your bulldog pipe, and the college clothes do not stick out so conspicuously, but all the same you're different." He eyed the

young man intently. "And besides, you'll be the district attorney, the first one whom they are unable to size up."

"I don't see what any honest man has to fear in that."

Curran smiled enigmatically. "Exactly! But there are Dan Boydston and Curry, the two men who put through Tanner's contracts on the board—all friends of your father's, but you—well, the old crowd wonders about you."

Harlan looked away. Boydston's daughter was one of the two or three town girls under his mother's especial social chaperonage, who met their eastern connections.

"Well, *they* all supposed that the son of your father was *safe!*"

Harlan watched him silently. The elder man went on more slowly: "It's just that things have come too easy for you, boy. Never had a rough and tumble fight in your life—clean, strong, sheltered! That's why I—I loved you, son! And why I—I envy you. I wasted so many years, oh, so many years!"

And while they sat in the dusk the eyes of both went to the street, to four men who were crossing from the courtyard. One was Rube Van Hart. Rube and autumn were here once more. Another was Arne Vance. Another was T. P. Purcell, the dapper young lawyer-manager of Mr. Curran's campaign. And the fourth was a little, cheap-arrayed, fast-talking man at sight of whom Curran started with a smothered cry.

Rube greeted them all with his laconic shyness. "Finished with the Cotton Belt League, Wiley. They

canned me when the pennant rush came. And here's a guy that used to know you, he says. Shagged up the line with me from Memphis. I happened to mention you, and he sure was delighted to find his old friend, Wiley! Ladeau, that's his name."

Curran was staring. "Maurice," he muttered at last.

The newcomer's small coffee-colored face wrinkled amiably. He held out his hand. Arne Vance and T. P. Purcell appeared noting, with merciless intentness, Curran's greeting. Curran, the most democratic of men, to whom even the lame dogs came for sympathy, appeared not honored by Ladeau's acquaintance.

"Curran," muttered Mr. Purcell, "Arne and I came on this man in front of the billiard hall. He was saying something—telling some crazy yarn. But we—we heard a bit, and we took him away!"

Curran glanced at his friend's face. Arne was grim. The newcomer went on with reminiscent pleasure: "Yaas, I sho' remember dat Wiley man! I say, when dis Rube tell me he is here: 'Our ol' Wiley? Name o' God—dat same Wiley of dem ol' scalawag days! How we laugh—him an' me, and Gamblin' Gawge, when we all get run out of Ascencion fo' dem games we run!' "

The candidate was staring, listening. Ladeau beamed on: "And at Plaquemine we was all broke. Name o' God, we all come down to ax ol' man Bouvier fo' feesh heads to make a cou'bouillon under de bridge."

Wiley raised a deprecating hand. He smiled wanly. "Maurice, I—I—never touched a card since." He

smiled still on his political backers: "Never, since—"

"Since dat leetle Adrienne made you promise when you tak her to N'Awlyns. Eheu, dem ol' Creole days!" He sighed—"Dat leetle Adrienne of Butte La Rose!"

The dapper Mr. Purcell coughed. Arne stirred. "Wiley, were *you* ever married?"

The chuckle of the stranger broke the pause. "Married? Dem Cajun girls, when dey love—*Nom de Dieu!*—dey don't stop fo' marriage!"

The Honorable T. P. Purcell coughed again. He glanced hurriedly out the door at a passer-by, then at the candidate. "I think, gentlemen, this is enough. All very interesting to Mr. Curran, but it's nothing to do with his campaign. I'm glad"—he wiped his managerial brow perplexedly—"*we* overheard *this!* I was coming to speak to Mr. Curran about his campaign this fall, and we just stumbled on this—ah—gossip, fortunately! We brought him to you, Wiley!" He looked at his watch and smiled: "This talk—if it *is* true—Well, I must go! And Wiley"—he turned to the candidate—"remember the committee wants you to go through Dallas County like a house afire. Start at Pleasantville on the tenth. But Harper will speak with you, and we'll arrange the rest of the program later." He came to take Wiley's hand—"And, old man, I'd cut out all these malingerings of youth with our loquacious friend, here."

"Tom," muttered Wiley, "it was almost twenty years ago!"

"Then it's all outlawed. But this constituency of yours—and you know how sensitive they are to gossip of the sort. Decent, wholesome, God-fearing people—

you know Americans in general will never stand for any sort of—of—well, this sort of thing, Wiley! Puritans—that's it—that's what we are! Except about *money!* But this sort of thing"—he looked about at the others again and smiled. "Just between friends, eh?"

Arne nodded. If Wiley Curran had confessed to philandering with the whole tribe of Cajuns, whoever they were, there would have been those to love him. When Purcell had gone, Arne arose and touched Wiley's arm. "Look here, why didn't you ever tell some one of this?"

"Why? It was long ago—before I drifted West—when I'd landed in New Orleans broke from Cuba. We had a filibustering gang and it busted. Oh, well—" he sighed. "Arne, what's the use of calling up things? I'm not ashamed of anything—much. Young and foot free—and, anyhow, I always played fair with women and everybody."

"I know it. But this—girl, Wiley? Did you marry her?"

There was a stillness for a long time. Outside a late bird was singing in the sugar trees and the wind was south. It seemed to bring a dream to Wiley's eyes; nights of youth, misspent but unutterably dear in memory.

"Did you marry her, Wiley?"

Wiley turned slowly toward him with a touch of defiance. "Yes."

Arne stood back. "That's all I want to know, old boy. And Janet, too! You'd better tell her. You'd better have everything above board to begin with. It's

the only way. Purcell's right—the people, the great, clean, wholesome heart of the people! They sort of love you, Wiley—but they wouldn't stand anything in a leader that seemed—a—a double life."

"It never was that! I never concealed a thing. Only here, when I drifted back to the old town, what was the use? All dead and buried, Arne."

"This girl?" Arne turned abruptly to Ladeau. "You know what became of her?"

"Dat Wiley man—ask *him!*"

"I was told," retorted Wiley, "that she died. It was after I went West—two years after. I—I sent her money, Arne. You see we never lived together—we couldn't make it go. And we parted—and she . . . died!"

Arne took his hand. "I don't care. I won't ask any more. I'm with Purcell. We'll be with you to the finish." He turned away with a sort of choke. To Arne Vance, with his ascetic humor of a propagandist, his capacity for enthusiasm, Curran had become, since his victory, a figure panoplied with power, their leader, their loved one. He had still a boy's vision and the need of hero-loving. When he had gone out to his team at the hitching-rail, Rube Van Hart sauntered after. "So Wiley's running for congress? Sufferin' Johnson, Arne—I can't believe it! But if this here Cajun I brought up from the bush-league towns is going to hurt him, I'll kill the cuss! Yes, sir; take him to Eagle Point and let him fall off—accidentally."

Arne looked back at the *News* shop. Harlan was in the door. The Cajun, in Wiley's office seat, rolling a cigarette, had come to stay, it seemed. "Hurt him?"

blurted Arne. "That story would beat him, if Tanner and his crowd ever got it! But we—we can keep it close, Rube, if you'll help."

"Help? Help Wiley? Why we was kids together—him and me!"

He got in with Arne and they drove off to the stables.

Back in the office, Ladeau, with the air of a barber in distress, oily-haired, shabby of coat, was fumbling in a pocket for tobacco. Curran silently extended his case.

"*Merci!*" smiled the Cajun. "Yo' sho' nev' fo'get old friends, Wiley!"

Still Curran had no word. Harlan, studying him silently, had never seen him so in a dream. The stranger settled himself in the chair with the air of one who had come on a lucky turn of fortune. "And I come up wif dat Rube and find yo' first thing! Rube say you run fo' congress?"

"Yes. I have the nomination."

"Who'd t'ought dat? Old Wiley who used to play dat guitar fo' dem island girls to dance at La Cheniere!"

The candidate ran his hands through his hair and looked off at the Methodist Church spire. "It's different up here, Maurice. I—I'm mighty glad to see you—but I—I—wish you hadn't come!" He seemed to have forgotten Harlan's presence. Suddenly he uprose and came swiftly to the other.

"See here, Maurice! Why can't you get out of town? You see you'll get to talking, if you hang around; and my friends—it will bother them! Personally, I don't care, but they—the people, these western country people—"

He stopped. In Ladeau's small eyes was a curious confidence of evil.

"Eheu! Dese Yankees! Dey boil d' coffee, Wiley! Savages! But dey don't know you, eh? Dat it?"

Curran was staring out the window. Ladeau came nearer. "I reckon yo' got a dollar fo' an old friend, Wiley?"

Wiley's hand went down. "Here."

"Mebbe five dollars? Look at dem shoes—name of God! Dat Rube—we walk from St. Joe!"

"I—haven't that much here, Maurice. But—well, I'll get it. But for God's sake, go; let me think a bit!" Then, as Ladeau shambled on a step, he hurried to him. "Wait. You know of Adrienne? She died—are you sure she died?"

"Madame Artois tell me when I go back to N'Awlyns fo' years after. She say she write yo'. She say yo' send back wan beautiful letter when Adrienne died—just what a poet would say, Wiley. Wan beautiful letter—but no money to bury Adrienne!"

"I—know. I was broke out in Arizona, Maurice. Madame Artois knows that. I just could thank her for taking care of Adrienne, that was all."

"Oh, madame know! She cry when she read dat letter. All women yo' can make cry, somehow, madame she say. Eheu, dat beautiful letter!"

Curran was watching past him to the western sky. "To-morrow," he muttered, "come back, Maurice, and I'll do what I can—that money. But I—haven't much. I'm in debt terribly."

He watched Ladeau shamble down the street feeling of the dollar, turning presently into the billiard hall

among the idlers. He did not see Harlan in the shadows. After a while he raised his hand toward the shiftless figure. "That—might have been *me!* Me—*me!* But God help me—I'm saved!"

From the numbing vision of his own past he turned slowly and saw the younger man. He came to him swiftly. "Do you hear, Harlan? Just that—a shambler, a wreck!" He sat down and covered his face with his hands. Presently he writhed with some agony. "God, what a man misses," he exclaimed, "what he flings away! What ghosts come back, Harlan! After twenty years!"

"What is it, Wiley—that hurts so?"

"I don't know. Fear—that must be it. Nervous fear. Of late it's been so fine just to live, Harlan. To go down the street and feel that you've done something! That you have ambition, purpose; and that they've counted with men. That's it—that you've *won!* New hope, new courage; I've felt like shouting it to all the world!"

"I know, Wiley."

"No, you don't, boy. You've got to be down and out first; you've got to be adrift and lose hope, and know yourself the failure first, before you can ever realize how fine it is to succeed, how sweet it is to live. Oh, boy, when I was your age I drifted over all the old West—it was a big adventure. I wanted to write what I felt—its sweep and power and bigness! Nevada, New Mexico, California, Alaska—wherever life beat fast and free, I wandered. But I couldn't write it—no—no! It was too big and splendid for me—the epic. But I *lived* it, Harlan! And then I came back here

when father died and left me the old shop. No one knew; I had failed, that's all. I settled down here and worked, but the old fine ardor was gone. Eight years of this village—common, prosy, dull—not one to speak with of the big things but you and Janet! And then I awakened—why here was the poem I had dreamed and lost—here was my work, my place, my people—" He lifted his arm and swept it out to hills beyond the leafy Square. "Yes, I got back my old spirit, my fighting soul, but I didn't put it into a poem, Harlan—but into politics, this battle—and won!"

Harlan had stirred before his ecstasy. Was this the man of yesterday?—this winging spirit, whom the smug town had never understood?—who had come back to an ennobling youth?

Wiley came to put his hand upon the younger man's shoulder: "I won, and there's something for me, Harlan. There's work, there's life—there's love!" He straightened and struck his fists together. "And I am not afraid, boy! I tell you I've not been myself all this year—I've been reborn!" He sat at his desk and stared out at the summer night. "The glory of it! The beauty of it!" Again he turned and reached his hand across the table to his friend. "Oh, the great hours we've spent here, boy! You can't tell what it all meant. You are so different from me, but here your manhood was formed, Harlan—and you watched my fight, too! Just battering away here at the old press—and then the light dawned. *She* came, Harlan!"

"She? Janet?"

The other man stared at him. "Janet? Why, no! Aurelie!"

Harlan did not stir. Then he muttered as to himself. "*They* told me!"

"Told you?" A high and serene smile came to Curran's face. "I didn't think any one knew! Why, who could guess? Oh, well—what matter! It's as Old Mich says: 'A little child shall lead 'em! Done lead 'em to the land o' joy!' Yes; that was it, Harlan. She led that old whisky-peddling soldier to love and decency; and she led me out of failure! God bless the kid with all her impudence and poses and absurdities!"

"You never told me, Wiley!"

"What was there to tell? It just grew on me—that's all." Then he stopped still; so still were they both that the crickets in the old shop wall resumed their singing. Wiley first groped to utterance. He turned, and his voice was a whisper.

"Harlan, that old affair?—you and Aurelie? You don't love her!"

"Yes."

Again the pause. And again the mutter in the dusk. "Why, boy, you told me long ago you'd given her up. She outraged you—*your* people—*your* standards—everything. Why, I never *dreamed*—" He stared speechlessly.

"No, I never told you. But I do, Wiley! I've waited—sometime she'll need me—sometime, when things go wrong in this abominable business she's in! I've worked and waited and kept silent—but I've watched!"

"She doesn't love you."

"She does."

The elder man was still. And suddenly the other leaned to him. "See here. What do you mean, Wiley?"

"Mean?"

"Yes. They *told* me—see here—do you love her?"

Curran was silent again. Then his soft laugh, but it was wrung from a strange loneliness.

"Love her? Are they saying that? Poor kid! As if she hadn't enough to contend with as it is! And I?"

"I ask you, Wiley?" The younger man's voice arose in passion. "Tell me!"

"You ought to know. You know what you've always been to me, boy. No one closer—no one in all the world! And what was finest for you—what was for your happiness—that is what I wanted always. But Aurelie—I couldn't think of that, somehow!"

"But love her, Wiley—*you!*" The younger man arose.

"No. I don't. Not that way. I can't. I'm a trifler with everything. Only Aurelie—I can't explain it. Some beautiful mystery is over it all. She touched me so! She's crept so near. She's made life and work so precious. God bless the kid! I tell you I can't understand it, Harlan!"

But the other man stared at him with his jaw setting. "I understand it!" He was up and turning to the door. "Yes!" And he was gone.

Curran sat in the dusk of his shop. "Who *will* understand?" he whispered. "Janet? Harlan? I can't myself! To dream of her—to shelter and protect her—if that is loving, then I love—"

He broke off staring into the summer night. It grew palpitant with phantoms; fears, fancies—ghosts trooping out of the long years of failure and despair. And he had thought of late that he had defeated the misbelieving horde.

CHAPTER XX

A LITTLE SILVER CRUCIFIX

THAT autumn, after the frost had put the fodder-cutting by, Bert Hemminger, the member of the county board from the bottoms district, drove down the road that wound from the clay hills back of the quarries to town, and came upon a curious sight. About the abutment of the unfinished bridge, under which the diverted waters of Sinsinawa Creek were to flow back to a long-choked channel, were cement barrels and grading machines scattered as if abandoned in some confusion. No work was being done beyond the line fence, and forty yards from that, on a blackened stump, sat a gaunt and silent man who rested a shotgun across his knees.

The county board member stared and then drove on. In front of Lindstrom's gate, where he turned to town, Hemminger saw Uncle Mich sitting on a broken wagon tongue. "What's this fool John doing up there?" he asked.

Michigan continued to whittle the old vegetable basket under whose cover he was wont to peddle his illicit trade. "Won't let the Tanner foreman finish the job, Mr. Hemminger. Done told 'em agin to quit. Perkins, the foreman, laid off his men and went back to town to complain agin."

"John'll get hurt foolin' with Perkins' dagos—and the law, too." The supervisor's eye went to the old man's basket. "Uncle Mich—when this new district attorney is elected, all you fellows will have to quit the whisky trade!"

"I reckon. The sheriff he ax all us bootleggers to let up until after he gets *reelected!* But I quit for good."

"Quit? *You!*"

"Done quit. My little girl did it, Mr. Hemminger. She and Mr. Curran, they done want me to quit. Mr. Curran and our little girl."

Mr. Hemminger drove on with a sigh. The story of "them actresses" had done Mr. Curran no good, despite his winning fight. Neither did his Quixotic championship of the Pocket squatters. Mr. Curran was always meddling in some unprofitable affair, the defender of some lame-dog cause. When Mr. Hemminger reached Janet Vance's office to discuss the new seats for his district school with her, he touched on Mr. Curran's weaknesses. "Somebody ought to hold Wiley in tight, Miss Vance. He needs it. And he's coming on so big, Wiley is."

She smiled, wondering what curious pain it gave her to hear Curran praised by these rugged men of the country who daily came into her office. Her farmer constituents took a shy gratification in Janet's appreciation of their homely affairs. They were proud of her also. "Old Jake's girl was a smart one—maybe she would marry this new fighting governor who was so mighty interested in her! But then there was Wiley Curran!" They were proud of him, too.

An hour later, glancing out, she saw Curran and Hemminger together, their shoulders to a heavy casting which some farmer was trying to load in his wagon at Dickinson's warehouse. And again her faint smile came. Yes, they loved him—they had made place for him. And she? Well, she had done her part also for him. And she knew him so much better than any of them!

Curran had been busied all the final campaign. There was fear that the old county gang would knife his candidacy, so his backers had kept him at the front. But he had no misgivings. He had returned to his home town brown and hearty, pleased with the sense of victory. He had discovered surprising qualities in himself, a caustic retort, a merciless clearness that pleased the farmers. The papers commented on his "brilliance." Janet had read and listened. It was more than winning a campaign; it was the making of a man.

He saw her when he passed the court-house and came to her, eager, volatile, bubbling with tales of the progressive cause. "I made 'em listen, Janet!"

Then in her calm eyes, back of her serene smile, he seemed to read again the inexplicable pain which he did not care to fathom. And he went from her, steadied by a sense of her faith, but refusing to dwell upon it. It was like his estrangement from Harlan—at first it had been a desperate hurt. But through the weeks, rising with his new fighting life, he had fiercely told himself that he would yield nothing; he was crying out to life with a Dionysian gladness—he would seize growth and power and recreate himself. So, when he found a letter from Aurelie on his desk, he cried out

as if a meteor had lighted his dingy shop. Aurelie, the village baggage, Old Michigan's girl; the one-time rabbit hunter of the hills, the ridiculous beauty-prize winner; an actress trapesing over the land with an ambition to come back with a bull-pup and a press-agent to startle the old town! Janet was right: if there was anything needed to "finish" Wiley Curran it was Aurelie Lindstrom. But he would not admit this. His Celtic sense of romance begilded his world still; a bit of tinsel would hold his eye and always would. Yet he knew better than any one how desperately he needed the cool and sober judgment of men and women—that was what could make him; that was what *was* making him now in his new life, the faith, the love of these prosy farm folk of the Midlands.

But Aurelie had written! And at once the walls of his shop fell away to vistas of enchantment.

"I'm engaged!" said Aurelie, in her firm, upright, high-school hand. Mr. Curran started feverishly. "In a musical comedy, and the manager says I can *sing!* Oh, what do you think of that? Not much, but *enough*. But Ada Norman says my face did it, and I'd never got a show if I hadn't made Cohan's office boy laugh. But I tell you, Mr. Curran, we were right up against it! Ada and I pawned our trunks, and when she stacked me out in the best clothes we could get I sailed into some of these people. And I tell you, Mr. Curran, the day I got my job we were down to oatmeal cooked over the gas-jet in our room. But there's nothing to a race but the finish! Oatmeal isn't so bad."

"Oh, Aurelie!" groaned Mr. Curran, "and that taxi,

and the dollar you gave a bell-boy over at the Metropole!"

The letter went on: "And what do you think, Mr. Curran, I was only in that chorus six weeks when Cohan & Snitz decided to put a road show out, and they picked *me* out of the New York production to understudy the comedienne. They said I was *funny!* I suppose I made faces and kicked up my heels—" "Oh, Rome! Oh, the Shakespeare Club!" murmured Mr. Curran.—"So I'm going out on the road with the second *Girl and The Burglar* company. We aren't so classy as the New York bunch but it gives me a chance. I like New York. You ought to see the clothes I've got. When we open in Chicago on the tenth you just got to come and see me act.

"P. S.—Tell all those grannies who don't like me, about *The Girl and The Burglar.* But don't say anything about the oatmeal!

"P. S.—Pretty soon I'll send you some stuff to put in the paper.

"P. S.—I saw three little rabbits under a bridge yesterday when the train went by.

"With love,

"AURELIE."

The congressional candidate folded the letter over so that only "With love, Aurelie" showed. He gazed at it. Then he sat down and tried to recall Aurelie. What she liked, and how she laughed or rebelled—what inevitability of life had made her as it made all the rest of us.

He went about the next month, in and out of the

county, speaking wherever the need took him. It was not until his next breathing-space, that, back in his office to pick up the odds and ends of work—for the task of getting out the *News* had fallen to Aunt Abby and his mongrel printers—he met Harlan. While Wiley had been on his whirlwind campaign, Harlan had kept to his petty lawyering with Donley. He had no fight to make. The county committee took care of that. His sort of politics needed no noise nor appeal—it was not a part of the Cambridge-Virginia traditions of his family.

Harlan came in on him one chill night of October. Wiley had been hurt, for it seemed, since his return, that Harlan had evaded him. Others had noticed it. Arne Vance had truculently attributed it to politics—Harlan was going the way of the old gang, was he? Well, Arne had grimly forecasted it. Associations and traditions were too strong for Harlan.

Curran and Harlan faced each other now with a dumb recognition of the hurt in each other's eyes. The old glad faith—where had it gone?

Curran had been at brief troubled analysis of it all, even with the turmoil of his battle. And Janet's serene aloofness, yet steadfast ardor for his success. "They think I *love her,*" he had muttered restlessly, time and again. "I—why, it's ridiculous! Twice her age, and—lordy! getting bald as I am—and everything about me—a trifler with women." And then he studied. "Well, that kid! God bless her! Nothing ever hit me so hard. I wish they'd understand!"

But to save Mr. Curran he couldn't make out what he wanted any one to understand. He was in some

bewildering struggle, he told himself—and could not understand himself!

He stood across his desk from the imperturbable young man. How Harlan had grown these years! His man's bulk and dignity, his outgiving of power and personality. Wiley had envied it, even with his great hurt love for the boy. It was curious how things come to one man without price for which another struggles lifelong in vain. He tried now to come back to the dear familiar ground with Harlan, and Harlan would not have it.

The younger man was unfolding a paper from his pocket. And suddenly a fear shot through Curran that it had to do with that hushed story of Ladeau's. They had kept it well quiet, yet it haunted his counsels. But Harlan, his voice cool, tense, spoke of another matter:

"Wiley, did you see this from the Chicago papers?"

Wiley took the review of last week's opening of *The Girl and The Burglar.* He stifled a shout of amazement. The woman who had been doing the leading comedy business had been taken ill the first night, and a girl from the chorus, who had understudied the part, had played her rôle. Aurelie!

"Saved the first night!" gasped Mr. Curran. "And I've been on the road and never heard a word of it!"

The grim young man silently extended other clippings. The reviewers were surprised, felicitous. Cohan & Snitz had "got by" with a musical comedy that had been on its last legs until the Chicago opening. And a new face—a girl with a funny personality had pulled it through. A girl who sang and laughed with a

happy audacity. A refreshing person who had no ingénue tricks, no footlight mannerisms—nothing except laughter and ignorance of convention. The reviewers suddenly recalled that this was the newspaper beauty-contest winner of—let's see? Was it two years ago? No one cared. Only, to that fact Cohan & Snitz's publicity bureau seized as only a drowning Hebrew manager can seize on a drowning forty-thousand-dollar show. They flung it broadside; they screamed it on every fence. The star roared and resigned. It did her no glory. Cohan & Snitz would have deified their office boy if he could have saved *The Girl and The Burglar;* and here an unknown western girl of their chorus had all the press with her, and all the public by some happy-go-lucky verve.

Mr. Curran laid down those clippings and wiped his eyes. "Where have I been?" he gasped again. *"Asleep!"*

"Read on," demanded Harlan.

Aurelie had been interviewed by the *Times.* She said she was from Rome, Iowa, but adored a bull-pup and lobster Newburgh. She was interviewed for the *Telegraph*—Sunday, first-page, supplement, specially posed photos and a sketch by "Max"—and said she liked all the Johnnies and used their notes to stuff a pillow for the bull-pup. Next day, declared the veracious publicity bureau, she received eight pups from eight millionaires and fifty mash notes.

Wiley laid down the clippings once more. "The dear kid," he murmured. "Eight million pups and eight million millionaires—I'd not care!" He looked up to meet Harlan's eyes. "And two months ago she was

living in New York—cooking oatmeal over a gas-jet! She's a humdinger!"

Humdingers are not in the Van Hart genealogy. In 1742, Ebenezer Van Hart married Agatha Ann Bunker, indentured servant. The Mrs. Van Harts of today never read the paragraph on page twenty-eight about Agatha Ann, one-time humdinger.

Harlan broke out wrathfully. "Wiley! You rejoice at it!"

"I reckon! The dear kid—let her go on just joyously! All she's done! The money she's sent back to Lindstrom's to pull 'em all through! And now she's got Uncle Mich's patent leg paid for—at last. And Uncle Mich sent Peter in to ask me to come out. A regular party to christen Mich's leg—that's what Aurelie said we must have—with flowers and laughter and everybody happy!"

Young Mr. Van Hart arose. It was no use to quarrel with Wiley when his eyes were shining so! No use to remind him of congress. No use to charge him with making a fool of himself.

But Harlan shouted from the door. "Aurelie—you got her into this! And you ought to know how girls get on in these music shows—the *only way!* No—" he shouted on passionately—"you don't love her—it's a joke!"

The editor stood up and wiped his glasses and looked after Harlan's retreating figure. "Love her? Confound the boy!" He knocked his pipe out on the desk edge. "Hey—O! If I was twenty-one—" he sighed. "But when I was twenty-one there was Janet, and I went out to see the tinsel world—" he sighed

again. "And now Aurelie and her tinsel show! Yet I reckon I'm glad I am what I am!"

After supper he went up the bluff road. Along this trail she had come flying to him in her despair. Above were the hills in whose autumn glory she had robed her loneliness. There the bleak field about the Lindstrom cottage lay. Out of all this meagerness she had come. And he had lifted her!

Even Lindstrom, gaunt and silent, welcoming him from the ravening dogs, could not chill his jubilance. He waved the papers toward Old Mich. The household stared at him.

"Hear this—all of you!" And he began reading the tale of Aurelie's glory. Even John was stilled. Albert's pale eyes shone. Old Michigan waved his pegleg.

"Done come!" he crowed. "Just as Captain Tinkletoes and me said it was! Aurelie'd done occupy all the lands and states and countries! And I done got the new leg she's been buyin', Mr. Wiley. But I ain't goin' to wear it. It's too fine and shiny, and cost a sight o' money fo' an ole whisky runner like me. Wouldn't get that leg out in the rain and mud fo' a pretty! So we hung it up in the parlor."

"But Uncle Mich—"

"Finest leg, I reckon, in this yere hull government! And yere's another man who knows Louisiany where the birds they sing so sweet—'way down-river where Aurelie done come from!"

There was a scurry. Ladeau was out and beaming on Curran, terrierwise. "Ol' Mich"—he cried—"we

struck up, talkin' dem ol' days! And I come offer my legal knowledge to dis case, Wiley."

"Legal knowledge?" Curran had put the unpleasing fact of Ladeau away weeks ago—and had paid him pittances of money. Now he was reminded.

"I study dat correspondence school of Pittsburgh when I was in Kansas. Ah, dat law—it hurt my healt'. So I carry bats fo' Rube. But dat law, I know heem. I advise M'sieu in dis trouble."

"The Lord will direct me." John's deep voice had the majesty with which martyrs walked to the stake. The iron was in his soul. Curran felt the vanity of argument. But Ladeau sniffled of some compromise he was about to make. He went on with a great harangue of terms and rights and settlements, while the Dane sat in his Cromwellian faith in the right and grimly listened. On the table was a shotgun, and hanging on the wall, a repeating rifle. Outside his lean hounds watched the road with instant warning of approach.

"But here's your family, John? What can you hope, if you get into trouble, for them?"

"God will answer. So I told the sheriff, Mr. Curran, when he came to see me. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' So I told him, and he went away. The Holiness Brethren have prayed with me, Mr. Curran, and they tell me God will see my cause just."

Wiley reasoned charitably that this was to be expected of a university that had no windows open to the sunny side. "John, I'd think twice—"

Ladeau beamed ingratiatingly. "I have t'ought for M'sieu. My legal knowledge. T'ree t'ousand dollars

we demand. I stand by M'sieu to get hees right. Name of God—no? Den we fight!"

Curran turned sharply on him. "Now, you keep still in this, Ladeau! Grafting on John and Uncle Mich now, are you?"

The Cajun shrugged. "I eat. I sleep. Up in dat loft with Uncle Mich," he sighed, "and here is dis room unused. It wait fo' mam'selle who run off fo' de stage!"

He sighed again deprecating such foolish sentiment. But Curran looked past him. It was Aurelie's room. Mrs. Lindstrom was by his side at the door. "Not a thing changed, sir—just waiting for her." She glanced at John. "My man, I think he's sorry. Aurelie was always a good girl—kind as could be." Her toil-weary eyes lightened meeting Curran's own. The boys crowded nearer. Old Michigan lifted his shaggy head. Albert, the pitiful pedler-agent, raised his glance from the catalogues he was everlastingly at. Even John listened imperturbably.

Word of Aurelie! Aurelie off in the world doing some sort of marvel! Aurelie, their defiant protector, the red-coated champion of old days when she fought the town boys for her ragged little foster-brothers! Never would one of them forget.

"Done comin' home!" muttered Michigan—"some day!"

"And she won't be stuck-up either!" said Peter. "She wrote Knute she was goin' huntin' with us up Eagle Point—when Nellie's pups grew big!"

They looked in the tiny room. Spotless, the bed hung in pink and white chintz, contrasting with the squalor

of the kitchen room without. Her love of cleanness, of pretty things; her buoyant hopefulness and nicety spoke in every line. On the dresser was her latest photograph in a frame made of a walnut-tree burl which the boys had found in the slough and which Michigan had dressed from its roughness. In a pitcher was a spray of late cosmos which Mrs. Lindstrom had saved from the last frost. Some way, for Aurelie they would shyly bring whatever of sentiment their hard lives held. Unseen, some grace of love she had left for them still hovered. They were waiting—the little white room held the air of a shrine.

And Curran, who knew of the clothes and food mysteriously carried into this house, for which Albert's piteous earnings and Mich's illicit trade had never sufficed, since John was crippled, felt the throb of their love. It had done more than give food, it had held them up with hope, with laughter and with joy. In spite of all; and even John no longer held her the devil's agent. But he would not speak of her.

Peter pulled open the drawer to her dresser. "Here's her little rosary, Mr. Curran. We found it under the clapboards, when the dogs chewed through after a rabbit." The boy's voice lowered tragically. "Paw, he throwed it there the night he made her run off—he said it was *Catholic!* And we hid it to wait till she comes home again, Mr. Curran."

Wiley took the bronzed chain and silver cross. A crude and simple piece of work such as a child might wear. But it was the only reminder of her vagabond life down-river. Michigan touched it in Curran's hands.

"Done wore it 'round her neck when I stole her for Old Man Captain. Yes, sir, he done wanted a little child to lead 'em!"

Ladeau slipped his oily fingers under the chain as Wiley laid it back.

"Eh? Dat strange work, Mr. Wiley!" He peered closer. "Only one man ever make dat. François on Chartres Street—look, he mark all his silver so!" he turned the crucifix. On the under side were crude letters. Ladeau put the trinket down and sighed: "Eheu! Dat bisque I have eat in dat ol' silversmith shop!" He rubbed his stomach—"Dat bisque—"

But they had turned away to listen to Wiley Curran.

"That crucifix, Mrs. Lindstrom? Might I take it and have it cleaned and send it to Aurelie? For a present from all of you—with love from all of you? She's such a great lady now!"

She looked at Uncle Mich. His face grew tender. "I reckon. I wouldn't let anybody but you take it, Mr. Wiley. She loved that little cross and chain. But you —I reckon you can, Mr. Wiley!"

Wiley turned back to the table. The chain lay there. But when he lifted it the silver cross was missing. He looked about; then on the floor.

"It's gone? The crucifix!"

The boys were searching in the rag-carpet rugs. Curran looked about again, at all of them—then at Maurice Ladeau. He was rubbing his hands with his old slovenly card-sharp trick, and smiling.

"Maurice, it was there when I laid it down!" He came nearer. The Cajun shrugged. "It was *there* when you picked it up."

"*Merci!* I been a thief den? Fo' a picayune bit of silver? I sho' never see dat!"

They looked about, under the bed and the dresser. But nothing was found. Michigan stumped out and crawled under the house to make sure it had not gone through some crack.

"Done been curious!" He came back and set his shaggy brows hard on John and then Ladeau. "But you take the chain, Mr. Wiley. Mebbe we'll find the little cross."

Curran was annoyed. "I'll get a new crucifix put on, Uncle Mich. Then I'll write Aurelie. But it's curious!"

He went home and, sitting in the shop, took out the chain to muse over it. "Done come up-river!" He smiled and held it off toward the light—"God bless you, Uncle Mich! You and your little girl! Done come up-river to occupy the land. To find the land of joy!"

And as he stood up later, closing the door to go to the cottage, he heard a roaring off to the west. At first faint, then growing as the train sped through the uplands' cut and reached the Earlville yards. In the *News* shop door, Mr. Curran listened, holding still the rosary against his cheek where her own baby lips had kissed it.

Then with his old fancy he waved it toward the east. "Because you're there, Aurelie—just because you're there!"

And a sudden impulse seized him. He was wont to do things on unconsidered impulses. He had an appointment with the Honorable T. P. Purcell, his politi-

cal manager, the next day at ten o'clock. But he suddenly growled: "Congress be damned!"

Then he whirled and dashed through the shop, up to his cottage and into his bedroom. Aunt Abby was snoring, as he crammed collars and brushes and ties and slippers into a suit case, and then dashed out again and over the fence with the lightness of a boy. He forgot to close the door. He scattered toilet articles from High Street to the Junction. But one thing he did not lose and that was Aurelie's rosary!

And by one of those curious chances of destiny which make or mar a man's life, the Chicago train was three minutes late, and he made it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TINSEL SHOW

HE had no difficulty in finding her. The posters before the Cohan & Snitz's syndicate theater were featuring her. The publicity bureau had spread far upon the value of that "$100,000 prize beauty" contest. Everything was fish, or more properly, Kosher meat that came to the net of Cohan & Snitz.

"And to think," murmured Mr. Curran that morning after breakfast at the Sherman House, "that Vawter, the artist, and *me* of the *News* were at the bottom of it!"

Aurelie had made a go of it, that was certain. Wiley learned of her hotel at the box office. It was one that startled him, for to the sober Midlands, it stood for all the city's opulence; to Wiley it was barbaric, Byzantine, dangerous.

"What?" he muttered, "has our little Iowa girl got to do, living at the Graystone? How the mischief can she afford it?"

For he couldn't free himself from Aurelie's vagabondage of the rabbit-hunting days. She was a many-sided person who could skin rabbits or sing enticingly each night: *If I Were the Only Girl in the World, Don't You Think You Could Love Me?* or some one

other of those American folk-songs which the Hebrews write for us—and sell us. Wiley passed a whole window pyramided with the great song-hit, and Aurelie's picture was on top of it.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "You kid!"

He went in and bought a copy of *If I Were the Only Girl,* etc. Then he ran across Jeffries of the *Times,* whom he used to know in Rome, and who envied Wiley for being his own master and the big frog in the little puddle; and Wiley said, "That's so," but secretly envied Jeffries his place in the big puddle of city newspaperdom.

Then Jeffries said curiously: "Saw you were in politics down in the old town, Wiley?"

"Sort of. The Delroy bunch got me to run against Jim Hall, and, bless me, if I didn't beat his head off in the primary."

"Thunder—*you* in congress! Oh, great guns, Wiley!"

"That's what they all say."

"Is Thad unanimous?"

"The old skunk will knife me, but the court-house ring is about down and out, I think. Had to put Harlan Van Hart on their ticket this fall to sort of brace it up. The people has riz up, and let a yelp, Benny, and I'm on the riz with 'em! Come on, I'll take you to a show this afternoon."

"Ain't one in town worth killing."

"What's the matter with *The Girl and the Burglar?*"

"Some more bunk handed us from Broadway. But the girl in it is all to the good. She's peeled off a three-bagger with this town."

"Sing?" quavered Mr. Curran palpitatingly.

"Not much. No one can in these shows."

"Act?" continued Mr. Curran, more palpitatingly.

"Not much. She doesn't have to. Nobody does. But this girl's got the nerve and personality, and the dear old pub. always falls for that. She just reaches out over the lights and grabs 'em with her smile."

"What—" faltered Mr. Curran, "is her name?"

"Ain't you heard? Aurelie Lindstrom. She came out of your corn belt somewhere. First season in big business. Cohan & Snitz took her out of a Broadway bunch green as grass, and the first night here she saved the show by making faces. The leading woman blew up and quit right there."

"Let's go!" cried Mr. Curran.

"Can't. I'm on the city hall to-day. But take it in, she'll do to pass an hour with."

Mr. Curran hurried away. He walked four blocks and gazed into another store front piled with *If I Were the Only Girl,* etc., "featured by Aurelie Lindstrom in *The Girl and the Burglar,*" and then another and another! And finally he went to the lake front and gazed on the massive pile wherein she lived. He had lost his nerve; he was afraid to go in. He forgot all about congress and affairs of state. He went to see a wholesale paper house on business, and took in the Art Museum, resolved that he would call on Aurelie at five. Then he reasoned that was too close to dinner and he'd probably bother her and six or seven millionaires who'd be hanging around in the portières; so he dined alone at the Annex and drank a pint of champagne as riotously as a country editor can drink cham-

pagne. After dinner it was too late to see her, so he concluded it would be best to watch her act first and make up his mind unprejudiced by personal contact. By great luck he got a ticket from a speculator, for the house was sold out. His ticket was for the last row, down-stairs, but he didn't care; it was enough to be under the same roof with Aurelie; the orchestra squawking and the program boys hustling over his feet; and all about him the dinner-filled and waddly importance with which people go to shows. Wiley had been long enough away from cities to take a pleasure in watching the mob crowd in, and hearing the rustle of their gowns and hats, and smelling their perfumes. The esthete's soul in him drew away from their lust of feed and spectacle, their exploiting banality, yet he knew this repugnance had no place in a politician and he was trying to be a politician.

Then the orchestra played that chirrupy, zing-zing music with which all musical comedies begin, and the curtain shot up to discover that theatric novelty which all good shows must have—the dilemma of the Rich Young Man. This time he was in disguise abroad, where he had followed the Daughter of the Wall Street Operator. Then the German Innkeeper, the English Lord, the American Aunt, the Chauffeur, the Waiter, the girls in the café, the cablegram, the ticker, and all those novel things for which the American people pay two dollars, and at which they laugh delightedly. There wasn't any burglar, but he wasn't necessary.

Mr. Curran waited feverishly. That kid, something surely would go wrong and spoil his delight!

But—she came.

Mr. Curran forgot to breathe. She was beautiful, and yet not so as he had seen her in the woods. But it wasn't that—out of her abounding and fun-loving health came alternately a droll abandon and then demureness; she was apart from all the professional people about her because of the delight with which she romped through her part. She hadn't a ghost of a stage voice, or a stage look, or a stage walk; the people were beginning to laugh when she came on, and she was laughing with them; and out of the silly dialogue of the Rich Young Man, who delighted everybody by stealing the Chauffeur's coat, she drew more two-dollar mirth for Cohan & Snitz.

"She can't act!" gasped Mr. Curran, horrified. "It's just only *Aurelie!*"

That was it. Just Aurelie enjoying herself immensely, laughing in a wondrous creation of a gown that wilted Mr. Curran even to think upon. Then she began to sing, still in a great good humor, that heart-throb of the American people: *If I Were the Only Girl in the World, Don't You Think You Could Love Me?* and the boys in the gallery raised a tremendous racket. She had to sing it four times and each time Mr. Curran rocked and moaned.

"She can't sing! Oh, *Aurelie!*"

But presently, with the uproarious pleasure of all these people, a great rapture came to Wiley Curran's heart. She was just Aurelie, yet magically she won her way, all health and grace and honest gaiety. That was all she had to give.

He went out after the act and had a drink, the tears

in his eyes. "The kid—the dear kid!" he murmured, and had another drink.

When he got back the stage was a great splash of color, girls, hats, gowns, arms, legs, imitation champagne, conversation about sugar stock and motor-cars; but Mr. Curran waited impatiently for the comedienne. He couldn't get to his seat and stood by the rail. But when she came, this time in a dinner gown and opera cloak and sang *My Rosebud Girl*—really, this time, with a native lyric sweetness—Wiley sighed with more content, which may, after all, have been the two drinks. It was an amazing splendor and success, and he looked about in complacence that he knew her and the others did not. And one of those glances went to the figure of a man standing near, which he watched curiously, for it was familiar. Then he saw it was Harlan Van Hart. Harlan, in the gloom of the foyer, watching imperturbably. Before Wiley could move, the young man's gaze shifted. He came directly, and without surprise, to the other man.

"Wiley?"

"You here?"

"You saw the *Journal* to-night?"

"No." He shrugged toward the stage. "Of her?"

Harlan motioned enigmatically. "Come with me. I want to show you. Although, I don't know why I should."

Curran followed to the café. They took a table. Harlan waved the waiter aside. "It's this—" He drew the paper from his pocket. "Why I came here. By God, to save her, Wiley, if it's true!"

The news article announced the supposed engage-

ment of Aurelie Lindstrom, of the Cohan & Snitz combination, to a young man whom all the West knew for his plunging on the Board of Trade, his motor racing, his divorce proceedings and his affairs with women of the underworld.

"I presume you know who Benham is?"

Curran's voice came in a whisper. "He lies! Ah, God, it's not so!"

"He dares publish it as so. And I came to see. I came to save her, and you—to amuse yourself!"

The older man stared at him. His hand came from his pocket. "I came to give her this. Her little rosary!"

Harlan's eyes were on it. It had lain upon her neck all those nights of his summer love with her. "Her name," he muttered on, "given as a former chorus girl—and coupled with Joe Benham's! It's horrible!"

"It's a lie!"

Harlan sat back coolly. His gray eyes beckoned the waiter. "I'll see." He was writing on a tab. Then, to the waiter: "Ring for a messenger. I'll send for her. To meet us here after the performance."

Curran watched him silently. Harlan had become the man. The touch of the Viking in his blond strength, which Wiley had always admired, was up, young, triumphing, primally ruthless. Curran would not have dared send that message—curt, direct, demanding that she come. He was conscious now of fighting against an obsession of the younger man's victoriousness. He would stop short of the gambler's chance, the staking of his all on his confidence in his own power.

And in fifteen minutes the boy came back. She had written nothing, she had merely told him she would come. Then they waited an intolerable hour, talking vainly on matters of the town, politics and business, law and newspapering. Wiley fidgeted; Harlan was imperturbably serene. The café filled with a crush of after-theater feeders, the hum and motion became livelier as midnight drew on. And then, when they were still trying to entertain each other with commonplace and constrained confidence, none of that old joy of intercourse between them, there was a stir behind their table and Aurelie was there.

They were both on their feet. Her amazement was delightful. She had a hand to each of them, crying out distraction; she was provoked at them; why hadn't they come like gentlemen to await her at the stage door instead of sending for her? She felt as if she had been arrested. Harlan looked at Wiley, and Wiley at him. She was puzzled—but she had come!

Already the café people were looking at them. Aurelie was colorful, aglow with small poses and careless graces; she smiled ingenuously on them with phrases of her barbarous French which, she had not been slow to learn, added to her distinction.

"I'm alone. I declined everybody for *you!*" And for their lives neither man knew at which she was looking—it must be both.

"You had an engagement, Aurelie?" Wiley asked her.

"Oh, just a little one—not enough to matter, like the Paris lady's baby! I'll make them all wait—for you.

Why hadn't they come like gentlemen instead of sending for her?

You know these chappy chaps I've got acquainted with don't bother me much."

Wiley looked at Harlan. Plainly Joe Benham's millions and motors hadn't dazzled Aurelie.

"It's fine to see you-all." She persisted in "you-alls", and "I reckons", and "aint's", when she felt like them. "Just fine. I did feel hurt because none of my old friends ever looked me up in Chicago. And me a real *lady* now! Mr. Levy says they're going to reorganize the New York production and give me a chance on Broadway—little old New York where Ada Norman and I nearly starved to death"—she picked an olive from the dish: "Oh, tell me how is Uncle Michigan and the baby?"

Harlan didn't know. "Fine!" retorted Wiley. "And Knute says there were never so many rabbits up on Eagle Point. He's waiting for you to come back, and he's training old Nellie's pups to trail 'em."

She was filled with laughter. She had a pup that could beat Nellie's! Yes, sir! "And how is your old shop, Mr. Curran, and Aunt Abby and her Banbury tarts; and which drunk printer have you got now—Jim Mims or the Dutch one?" She played her part before her school-day lover; not for worlds would she have noticed his silent stubbornness. "Do you-all really want me to come back and play in the tin opera-house? How big and grand it used to seem! I never went except way up in the gallery with Knute, and I used to see you boys—Mr. Curran in a front seat, for he didn't have to pay anything; and Harlan always there with some of the high-school girls."

She sighed demurely. "That was before *I* went to school!"

"Aurelie," put in Harlan gravely, "you've not changed a bit."

"I'm not going to change. I'm not gone greatly on these cities. When all these managers and stage directors get on their high horse with me I say: 'Oh, you go to the devil—you don't impress me a bit!' And then they threaten to discharge me or something, and I say: 'Go ahead—I can go back to Rome, Iowa, and play in the tin opera-house! Hen McFetridge is going to buy it for me!'"

"You ever hear from Hen McFetridge?"

"The twins wrote me from San Francisco. They've made money again, out of mineral water this time."

Harlan frowned. Hen and Ben had not improved Aurelie's good name in Rome, Iowa, by going bankrupt backing her maiden stage tour. She rambled on: "Now tell me, who made this up to come in and surprise me?"

They looked at each other. "We met here to-night," said Harlan, "in the theater."

"Indeed?" She read them a shrewd instant. "And do you like the piece? I don't. It's silly, Mr. Curran. I don't think so much of the stage as I did. It's all graft, and unless a girl is very lucky she won't get on unless"—Aurelie paused—"unless she has the *right* friends. But people have been mighty good to me."

"I suspect, Aurelie," murmured Mr. Curran, "you are mighty good to them."

She gave Mr. Curran a soulful enigmatic glance. "That's why I like you, Mr. Curran! Just saying

things like that!" She sighed: "Harlan wouldn't!" She looked at him with long reproach.

Harlan could not smile. He was bewilderedly trying to imagine where Aurelie had acquired all these manners and yet not overlaid her naturalness. She dressed beautifully, yet with taste, even with all her old vagabond love of colors. She made them live with health. Cohan & Snitz knew this impress on the audiences. Pretty things and gladness! But one of the reviewers talked of Aurelie and the psychology of dress, and Aurelie shuddered. *Le bon Dieu,* did not psychology have to do with ghosts!

She went on plaintively merry: "Sometimes I do get tired. Ada Norman says I haven't enough talent to go on except my face. Just like a lot of kids who've come up from the chorus—pretty soon I'll have to depend on the masseurs, and grease paint won't make up what I lose. Then *zing!* says Ada!" Aurelie looked thoughtfully at them both. "But you know I don't care. I'm going to save my money, and have a cunning little place and some babies, and go hunting rabbits sometime with Uncle Mich in the snow!"

"That is a large and brilliant program, Aurelie!" Mr. Curran had to laugh. Harlan's smile came doggedly at last. It was hard to resist her spirits. She was unspoiled, but joy had been set free! In the hearts of both men had grown a miserable shame that they had quarreled over Joe Benham. The gilded youth, and the blatant press for Aurelie who was thinking of Old Michigan and tracking rabbits in the snow!

She went on stabbing the town and stage folk with a vivacious and heedless wit. She asked of Rome,

Iowa. So Harlan was in politics? What was he running for? She just couldn't remember when she told the comedian whom she had the "date" with to-night. She had said her friend was running for the penitentiary! And *Mon Dieu*, the comedian interpolated this in his lines and broke her all up with laughing. And the house didn't know, of course—but it laughed with her!

Harlan listened. A Van Hart chuckled at by a comedy man—and chucked into his lines was exasperating—as exasperating as trying to be stern with Aurelie! She was bubbling with laughter. "District attorney! Of course! Something long and important! I didn't mean the penitentiary!"

And she almost had the two men laughing with her—almost. Only the desperate hurt was there. And not for worlds would they have mentioned Joe Benham. Wiley looked triumphantly across the table at Harlan. Right? Of course he was right.

"But why did you come, Mr. Curran? Just to see *me?*"

"To give you this, Aurelie." He drew out the rosary, and her cry of joy, the quick rush of tears to her eyes was reward. She had the lost trinket to her lips, to the amazement of all the after-theater feeders.

"The boys found it behind the clapboards in your little white room."

"Oh, my little white room!"

"It's just as you left it. They keep it waiting for you, Aurelie."

And then she cried indeed amid the café feeders.

Wiley looked away. "A child—just a child, yet, Harlan," he muttered, and the other nodded.

"They all love you. Even John. Your help and gifts and letters—why, even sour old John couldn't get around it all!"

"I loved him, too—only he was too religious for me!"

Mr. Curran pointed at the rosary. "So you are, Aurelie. Or thinking of Uncle Mich and Peter and the baby wouldn't make you cry—among this sort of people! And this queer little chain of yours. It must have been your mother's—and I know where it came from."

Her eyes widened. "My mother's? Yes—yes—but where?"

"New Orleans. A crazy silversmith on Chartres Street who thought he was a genius. So he marked all his rosaries and never made much else."

"Why, I had it when I done come up-river. When Captain Tinkletoes stole me! Uncle Michigan says he thought I was a *boy* when they stole me!"

"I know Mich's old yarn. But this rosary—I hate to show you—but—the cross is gone."

She looked quickly at him. He so understood what it would mean to her. And Harlan, watching the two, saw what a common piece of sentiment they were, the same vagrants of soul.

"I wouldn't say anything about it," murmured Aurelie, "only it was my mother's. And it's dreadful not to have a mother—only Ada Norman and a hairdresser!" She left an arch sad smile with Mr. Curran.

"Sometimes, I'd rather not be a homeless stray. But I suppose people must go rattling on in their harness and never do the things they love. Sometime, I get the old longing to run off down-river with Uncle Mich. And take you, Mr. Curran!"

Then she broke his enchantment with her laughter. "Harlan looks as if he thought *we-all* were perfectly crazy! Well, I suppose one can't. Some chap is going to write a new piece—just for *me*. A real star part. I think they call it *The Girl With the Pink Eyebrow*." Harlan's face set hard. That was it. *The Girl With the Pink Eyebrow*, or *The Girl and the Duke*, *The Girly Girl*, *Half a Girl*, *More Than Girl*, or some other of the pandering to this modern age, which no longer able to exult in the rapine of cities, takes its lusts to the orchestra chairs. Which makes for a "good run" as well as art.

"So, I reckon I'll keep on working," Aurelie was saying. "Some day I'll buy a farm for Papa John and lots of things. They've offered me a contract for next season that scares me when I think of the old hungry days—those days when I was just Old Michigan's girl, with no name or anything."

They had read of Aurelie's salary. It was more in a week than Mr. Curran and his caterwauling Rome *News* made in three months. Back home people straightly refused to believe anything of the sort.

The after-theater feeders were leaving, swishing and waddling away with sidelong glances at this colorful black-eyed girl who sat between the imperturbable young man and the older eager one. Harlan had beckoned for the waiter and ordered a cab.

"It's one o'clock," he said, "and you ought to be at your hotel, Aurelie."

She shrugged as if about to rebel, then was silent. Some old habit of obedience to him held her. Wiley guessed it. He would have sat all night watching this miraculous Aurelie. He resented Harlan's tone. When she had arisen and was busy with her wraps, each man leveled a challenge at the other. Then, to Harlan's lips a resolute smile came. "I told you she would come," he murmured.

Aurelie was approaching. Never had she looked so humanly beautiful as under the garish lights of the café vestibule,—never so quick with feeling, so true with life. Her world had not spoiled her—had not touched the generous simplicity in her. When they were in the cab, whirling away to her hotel, she reached from her furs and patted Curran's hand with a happy little sigh.

"I do think dreams come true! Away down-river I remember putting hyacinths in my hair and staring down in the water. I thought I was pretty! And *that* came true! Just the gray cypress woods, and the lilies floating to the sea, and the mocking-birds singing; and the Indian woman catching shrimps on a stick, and Captain Tinkletoes telling war stories and digging for buried treasure! But Uncle Mich said we'd go off sometimes and see all the lands and states and countries. Oh, something very wonderful must be up in those lands and states and countries! And *that* came true! The land o' joy! We'll find it sometime, won't we, Mr. Curran—people like you and me?"

"Find it!" he cried, "Aurelie, it's *here!*"

"*You* understand," she answered, and settled back on the cushions with another luxuriant sigh.

The two men left her at the hotel. She had a curious, shy, studied sweetness for them both in her parting that left them silent as the cab rattled away to the railroad station through the dreary after-midnight streets. Once, passing a corner lamp, Curran saw Harlan's face turned to him calm, hard, victorious.

The elder man could not repress his cry.

"Damn you, Harlan! You came here doubting her, and I never doubted her. She's good—good—always *good!*"

"I know. Because she loved me after all. That held her good through all this life—the notoriety and glitter—because she loves me, Wiley!"

The other man could not answer. His cry now was to his own heart. He seemed battling to evade some ineffable self-pathos that would find its way. Harlan—always to Harlan life brought the best without price, without struggle.

He would say no more. When they were in the smoking-room of the Pullman they again were silent; and when Harlan had gone to his berth, Curran went forward through the train seeking an open platform. He wanted the open, the stars and freedom—he must have air. He found an unclosed vestibule and sat staring out at the night, the black of the prairie Midlands, with far off the silken veil of the city flung luminous against the sky.

"Ah, well!" He tried to reason. "The boy—he loves her, after all. And all the years he's been first with me—*first* in everything." He could not grasp

his sense of fatherhood, tender, mystic, encompassing, for Harlan. Yet always it had been so—this friendship that he had held so beautiful, so true. Then Aurelie had come to lay a finger laughingly against this faith. To dazzle him, to enrapture him—to bring the hurt to Harlan's eyes, and inexplicable rebellion to his own.

"Eh, well—those children!" He arose, sighing. "It's for me to play the man at last! God bless them! I love 'em both—and neither could understand how or why. And I can't either!"

He went back defying his rebellion, stumbling to grasp his old loyalty, that fine ardor for his friend, which had made the long years sweeter. It was hard to define his struggle. A faint smile came to his lips at the suggestion that he loved—nothing like that was a part of him, he had said long ago.

"I'd tell Janet," he muttered, "if she'd understand—but she wouldn't. Yet Janet—Janet knows me—and understands 'most everything!" Then his sad smile came again. "Janet—after all, she's nearest—and dearest. But, somehow, it took Aurelie to awaken me!"

CHAPTER XXII

NEMESIS

FROM that night Curran went about his work as if a lamp lighted the way for his feet. He amazed his supporters in the concluding weeks of the campaign. A serene, yet boyish joy, a confident step, a brightening eye, and brilliant daring in debates; a sense of power discovered and the rapture of achievement.

"What's come over him?" muttered Arne Vance to his sister. "It can't be just the election! Elected? Why, he'll roll up the biggest majority any man ever got in this county! The Democratic central committee have as good as thrown up the fight. And the Tanner split is a joke—I'll bet Curran will even carry the High Street precinct. Rube Van Hart and I went all around the Square offering three to one on Curran and couldn't get a bet!"

Janet looked calmly at her brother. In his ardor of the fight he had not noticed her preoccupation of late. Steadfast in her work; resolute and untiring in her counsels to the impetuous and ill-controlled young men who dominated the headquarters of the impecunious Progressive League over in Earlville and managed Curran's fight. "Thad swears he'll resign the county chairmanship if Wiley wins," he went on, "and that means the end of things!"

"Yes," she answered, "the end of things!"

He watched her curiously, noting now her weariness. He wondered if she had come upon that story of Ladeau's which he and Purcell and Rube Van Hart had so successfully kept stilled. Wiley himself might have told her. At least, with all Janet's loyalty, Arne discerned some unfathomable negation in her heart. He laid it to her tiredness; the stress was inevitably too much for a woman, even for Janet's superb health and iron vitality. But with a brother's constraint he did not intimately question the matter.

He was busied with plans for the big meeting the night before the election. Curran had never spoken in his home town. He had always evaded it, and early in the campaign his managers had thought it wise. But now, when he had addressed the people in every country district, in every town of the constituency—when he had met every issue and the progression of his cause had spelled his triumph everywhere, McBride, Purcell, the Vances, and all the exultant group of young men in Earlville, had insisted that they conclude the battle in his home spot. That battle, indeed, was won; but they wanted to brawl their victory in the faces of the old county ring at Rome. Curran had assented; he caught the fire of their ardor. And it would be pregnant for his own soul. Here, where he had been the failure, he would sting them with his success!

"It can't go wrong," exclaimed Arne, "not even if every mossback in this town stayed away. We'll take care of that. The Earlville bunch will send over enough to pack that dinky opera-house and then we'll overflow on to the court-house lawn. Two bands and

red fire, and we'll burn up half the sidewalks on High Street. Rub it in—yell it in their faces, damn 'em!"

The town was talking of that wind-up meeting of the Curran campaign for two weeks. The old-line county committee was helpless. Old Thad Tanner might curse impotently in his office; but on the street Curran walked with the consciousness that men looked back at him. The transformation suddenly became acute in the minds of his townsmen; the farmers, over their Saturday trading in the stores, said that "all the folks would come in to Wiley's meeting".

Old Mowry, the undertaker, with his ten years' grievance against the county crowd since they threw him out of the coroner's office, ambled into the *News* and sat where he could stare at the Widow Steger's—always "waiting".

"Busted, Wiley!" He cackled: "Why, this mornin' even Dickinson admitted they was *busted!* Some of these days there'll be a board that'll pay me for that nigger I buried! Wiley, wa'n't I always your friend?"

Friend? The town, the county, the vast Midlands all voiced it.

He was getting his mail the day before election when Cal Rice, a white-faced, young-old man, habitually reflecting the last word of his first wife's father, Thaddeus Tanner, detached himself from a group in the post-office lobby to detain him. His pasty smile was apologetic.

"How's prospects, Wiley?" The banker had never before had anything but a grim nod for the editor.

"Splendid!" He felt a throb of magnanimous condescension.

"I suppose you'll want to renew your mortgage on the first?"

"I think not, Mr. Rice." Wiley smiled leisurely. "The Merchants' Bank of Earlville will take it up."

Rice looked up quickly. "Ah, your friend, Purcell, I suppose?"

"I've a good many friends over there. Well acquainted these days. So I'll take up that mortgage when it's due. Eight hundred and forty dollars, interest and all, isn't it?"

"Something like that. Drop in this morning. We'll look it up." Rice fidgeted a moment. "There's another matter, Mr. Curran. Come at eleven."

Mr. Curran drew out his watch lazily. He found it hard to conceal his triumph. Cal Rice of the First National coming to him, wanting a conference! Beaten, eh? And they knew it—the whole court-house crowd! They wanted to placate the victor, that was it. In a flash Wiley guessed it—Thad Tanner was going to offer some compromise, plead for some agreement with him—anything, so that Thad might retain control of the county committee. Curran in congress and solid as he was in the county would dethrone Thad from his local power "sure as shooting fish in a bucket!" All over town they had discussed that days ago. If Thad lost his grip some mighty unpleasant stories of board contracts might come out. They were gossiped about, had been for years.

And now Curran thrilled with it. He had felt it coming. He had told Arne, and Arne had cried sourly: "Kick the old son-of-a-gun out of your shop if he ever comes to you!"

Rice's next words sealed it. The banker shuffled nervously and then went on: "Curran, you've been dead wrong about the First National's attitude toward your fight. We're not—er—against you—not at all—not at all. And er—you'll come over at eleven?"

"Hardly," Wiley drawled with irritating amiability. "Expecting a telegram from Governor Delroy—something about the campaign." He looked at his watch again, conscious that every man in the group was listening and in fifteen minutes would spread the report that Thad Tanner was going to quit the fight on Curran. Then he said: "Make it eleven-fifteen, Rice. Best I can do to-day."

"Ah, that will do—that will do!" Rice rubbed his palms and smiled. "Thank you, Mr. Curran." He hurried on as if some elaborate program was to be arranged for Mr. Curran. Mr. Curran looked about the group of county politicians. The red-necked Boydston was frowning evasively. The others were still. It was Curran's moment of triumph. He went leisurely down the street with his mail. Mrs. Van Hart was driving into the Square. She did not notice Curran of the *News,* but Curran smiled airily. He could afford to be complacent to High Street now. He was Curran, the insurgent leader of the south counties; he had broken the ranks of the Reserve. He was a friend of the governor. Best of all, the country folk knew him. He was "their man". He wished he could see Janet. He would have liked to tell her this.

At half-past eleven—purposely he had kept Rice waiting fifteen minutes—he strolled over to the bank corner. The door—a small one at the side used by

the officers—opened before he touched it. He had had an impression that Rice had been watching him from the shade of the window in front and had scurried back to let him in. That was another sense of his winning. Even now Rice bowed and trotted ahead down the gloomy bank corridor.

"This way, Mr. Curran. Ah, late? Not at all—not at all!" He opened the door to his private office and the guest went in. It was rather dark, but Curran knew that a number of men were there. He paused, surprised to see Ransdell, the editor of the Earlville *Mercury-Journal.* But, then, Thad controlled the *Journal.* Boydston, the supervisor, whom Curran had fought for six years, was there. Judge Van Hart was there, sitting obviously ill at ease by the door; and Old Thad, the wizened county boss, in his swivel chair before the bank directors' table. Curran looked them over with a belying calm. They were a representative gathering of his ancient enemies—men of the old régime in politics, in wealth and social place in the county. He was received in a silence that somehow was slowly strangling the fine glow of confidence in which he had come. He felt himself intuitively brace as one does to whom a physical peril is imminent. The air was hostile. It breathed evil; the room had the menace of a trap.

Thad was cutting a cigar leisurely. He did not rise nor extend a hand. When he spoke it was with a precision as one stating a prearranged program, a conclusion to which the others had given assent.

"Good evening, Mr. Curran. We were expecting you."

"So I imagine."

Tanner sat forward, his brows contracted over his narrow eyes. Then, in his raspish voice, with the direct disregard of courtesy which always made his authority, with a weaker man, take the aspect of bullying, he went on: "We sent for you, Curran, to ask you to withdraw your candidacy before the people of the eighteenth district."

Curran appeared unmoved. So swift had been his revulsion, so sure was he of a trap, that he had steeled himself. He had an instant struggle to speak with the cool satire which was all they saw.

"Gentlemen, you ask a good deal."

The other stirred. They had expected amazement, at least.

Tanner eyed the victim shrewdly. "It's our duty to ask a good deal. The party's welfare, the good name of our people—I may say the purity of our homes—demand it. I presume you know what I mean."

Curran looked steadily at him. "I presume, in turn, that you mean a story of my early marriage—a story brought to this town and to your attention by Maurice Ladeau?"

Thad was irritated at this cool pertinacity and frankness. He had boasted a moment before to Judge Van Hart that he would make the *News* man cringe and crawl.

"Yes. An incredible story, Curran, an intolerable story! A girl you deserted—and without marriage."

"There was a marriage."

"We have the facts. They came to light strangely

enough. You left this girl—Adrienne Le Gania—in New Orleans in 1891. She died the following year during an epidemic of yellow fever." Thad was looking at a slip of memoranda, and with each point he tapped the table with his pencil, his face, under the light, pallid, graven mercilessly as that of a prosecutor of an inquisition. He looked up briefly: "Am I right in these facts?"

"You are."

Again the group moved at Curran's quiet confidence. Again Tanner leveled an eye, for the moment nonplussed, upon him. "You left her and went to Mexico. She lived on at an old woman's house—Madame Artois—and died there the following year, leaving a child!"

The man standing before them did not move. His eye was as steady as Tanner's own. But he twitched inwardly with the shock.

"You recall that?"

"No. I never knew of that—and it is a lie!"

He had broken from his spell at last. He started forward with a hot menace.

Thad raised his hand deprecatingly, but his grin of triumph came. He had made his boast good to the others that he would crush the editor.

"There was," he went on laconically, "a child born on the third day of June, in a hospital on Rampart Street. We have the name. The child was baptized on the first of August. We have that name—the name of the priest; it was taken charge of by an institution—we have the name of that institution. We have the after history of that child—we know its iden-

tity to-day. Do you follow me, Mr. Curran? Do you believe me?"

"No."

"You admit this—marriage?"

"I admit nothing except that my wife died during the yellow fever when people were rushing out of the city. I wrote to ask of her—to this same Madame Artois, you mention—yes. But I did not desert her—and there was no child of this union."

He spoke steadily again. Judge Van Hart was studying him. They all were watching. He had impressed them. Even Old Thad nodded appreciatively. Then he went on: "Well, we need not quarrel on the issue. The point is that we, as representatives of the party, of the honorable men and good women of the community—for the good name of that community—ask you to withdraw from the congressional contest. It is not a pretty tale, Mr. Curran, and we have no desire to spread it broadcast. Our people, you know how they detest a double life—a concealment—a lapse in personal morality—the honest wholesome sense of decency in our country people—"

Wiley had raised a hand. "Wait," he retorted, "what if I do not deny the matter?"

There was a pause. Ransdell of the *Mercury-Journal* muttered. Boydston glowered. They had been gibed so often by Wiley Curran that they had glutted their imaginations with the picture of him dumfounded, crushed to earth.

"Not deny the matter?" Tanner looked up sharply.

"No."

"You dare admit it?"

"I do not admit it. But, gentlemen, I will tell you this: You have called me in here in secrecy and menaced me with this story. You have called on me to resign under threat of this story. And I tell you —No!"

He stepped nearer, his eyes flashing. He struck the table before the county chairman's face.

"Go ahead with your story!" He whirled on Ransdell of the *Mercury-Journal:* "I know what you were brought here for! Go on—spring that damned story to-morrow in your sheet—scatter it over the county! And you"—he faced Boydston—"I've called you a thief for six years, and you've never had the nerve to come to my office and tell me I'm a liar! And you, Cal Rice—a poor dog who rattles his chain when the boss speaks! And you, Judge Van Hart, I'm surprised at you, a good man. Yes, a good man—the most pitiable object in American life to-day—a *good man* who stands for other men's crookedness. You are all a pack of blackmailing liars!"

Ransdell was on his feet furiously. Boydston growled hoarsely. Judge Van Hart arose, paling to the lips. But quicker than all, Thad Tanner was on his feet and between them.

"Gentlemen! Be still! This heat—this is uncalled-for!"

"I refuse to withdraw! I call your bluff! I'll print that story myself! The story of my life—all of it—the least of it. And with that story I'll go before the people of this district and say that I was summoned here and blackmailed. That you *bought* this story of a hound and with it tried to force me out of public

life. You, who profess to guard the morals of this community! I'll publish to-day—*press day*—my story. It shall have all your names—all your smug respectable faces—and in it I shall tell that you brought me here and, for a *consideration*, agreed to hush up this villainous awful past of mine—you, the Best People, tried to force and *bribe* me out of politics! That shall be my story."

Cal Rice, of the Presbyterian Church, muttered. Boydston moved in a jellyfish way. Judge Van Hart hastily reached for his hat. "Gentlemen," he gasped, "we were not summoned here for this! I beg of you"—his voice failed him—"let me withdraw—let me withdraw."

Curran's grim smile was on him. "Your Honor, it is no place for you."

"A moment." Thad rapped the table. "Let us have this clear. You refuse to withdraw?"

"I do. Tell your story! I'll tell mine. Yes, to-night—at my meeting—here among my home people. Let any man of you arise to-night and accuse me—I'll admit it! And by God, I'll ask the people what manner of men you are. I'll appeal to them—their sympathy, their hearts, their reason—with just a story of my youth—a story that might have been any man's! The people—the great honest heart of the people!"

Thad was smiling coldly. But a curious admiration was in his eyes. He lifted his hand. "Gentlemen, he defies us!"

"I defy you!"

The little gray boss smiled on. Cal Rice was wringing his hands. Boydston was wriggling uneasily,

red-faced, frightened. Judge Van Hart was already in the doorway, lifting his hat with a gesture of deprecating despair.

"A moment." Thad waved them to the door. "I shall ask you to withdraw, gentlemen. And say nothing of this—nothing whatever. I think"—his voice was now ingratiatingly friendly—"that Mr. Curran will withdraw. We will discuss the matter." He waved them on with his subtle authority. "Eh, Judge Van Hart! I shall ask you to remain. The rest of you?"—he smiled and rubbed his white hands—"well, I can assure you that Mr. Curran will withdraw! He will see the wisdom—the urgent *need*—I assure you."

They stared, astonished. The Earlville editor was protesting as he arose. "Mr. Tanner, you assured me the *Mercury-Journal*—"

"The *Journal* will get its scoop. Mr. Curran, even, will agree to that."

The others were leaving. Wiley stood alone watching the small figure under the table light. At crises there was a sort of dignity about Thaddeus Tanner. The indomitable will, the intuitive reading of men, the assumption of authority—he was worthy of his power. Even Curran felt the little boss's way with men as this slow scrutiny enveloped him. When he looked at Thad after the going of the others, the mask-like face was smiling—and that smile, some way, struck a curious fear to his heart.

His calm dry tone heightened the impression. "You still refuse to resign, Mr. Curran?"

"I do. We will submit it to the people. Their good sense, their honesty, their charity—"

The little boss sat down across from him and sighed. "Let us pass that by. I admit admiring the fight you've made. I've formed a different opinion of you during the last six months, Curran. And to-night—well, I don't mind saying that I threw up the sponge. We couldn't beat you—I've thought it for weeks."

"Well?" Curran was almost ashamed of his ungracious note.

"Nevertheless"—the boss rubbed his thin hands—"you will resign."

"I told you no."

"Yes—but you will."

The white old hand was raised to point at him. And from that instant Curran felt the ground slip beneath him. He glanced at Judge Van Hart standing pallid, oppressed, by the window.

"I will not!" he blurted.

The little man sat back easily. He selected a cigar from his case and lighted it. Then he stretched his legs to reach a cushion. "Let us see, Curran. Imagine the case. You have guessed that we have employed this fellow Ladeau. I admit it. I sent him to New Orleans. He came back yesterday with the fragments of your interesting history. More—some extraordinary features of the matter—something never contemplated by me. He took, in fact, when he went South, what appeared to be a most improbable clue to a theory of his own. A trinket from a child's necklace."

"Necklace?" Curran stared wonderingly.

"I imagine a necklace. At any rate, this"—and from

the open drawer of the table Thad held up a silver cross.

The other man did not answer. His mind was groping back. The silver cross hung under the light, and all about mists of darkness gathered. Even Thad's voice seemed like a distant bell, so swept away was Curran's perception of time and place.

"A silver cross which Ladeau took to an old silversmith he knew in New Orleans. An eccentric fellow, it seems, who, out of vanity, used to keep an account of all the stuff he manufactured. He marked them all, and from him Ladeau learned exactly to whom this was sold. It was bought by this Madame Artois and given to your child."

Curran leaped to seize the thing under the light. "Tanner, what are you getting at? By God, this was stolen—stolen by Ladeau from John Lindstrom's!"

"Exactly. It belonged to his girl—Aurelie!"

And still the man before him groped at the unbelievable. His clutch about the silver cross tightened. He stumbled forward and, as Tanner stepped back, sank in the boss's chair.

"Do you believe me?"

Curran did not answer. Then he whirled up. "No, you lie! This cross—what is it? There might be a hundred like it!"

Tanner smiled again. He reached to the desk button. "I had arranged things with some care. I did not wish to have this affair balk on me. And there was no actual need of more than you and me to settle it. So—my witness!"

Curran was aware that the door had opened. He

looked up to see Old Michigan there, his hat off, his eyes staring wonderingly out of his white beard. He stumped noiselessly across Thad Tanner's rugs.

"Mr. Wiley"—the old rebel turned hurt scared eyes upon his friend—"I didn't want to come hyar, but they had me. The sheriff and the district attorney and the judge—they could done sent me to jail for a hundred years on all my whisky paroles if I hadn't come. But I'd a-gone for you, Mr. Curran, if you'd been helped! But this is *truth*—and I'm glad!"

"Glad?" Curran felt the old rough hand closing over his own, keeping his senses to reason. "Uncle Mich!"

"My little girl's done found her father."

From his chair the gray boss smiled, content that the drama acted out itself without word from him.

"Ladeau done it," went on Michigan. "He just put it all together when he found that little cross and chain. I told him all I knew of Aurelie, just as I've told everybody. And he knew you'd had a child down there. And he knew this very little cross was given to her by some old woman—and then he took the whole story to Mr. Tanner, and Tanner sent him South, and he found the silversmith—and it was all true! Mr. Wiley, the same little girl I done bring up-river was the same one they put in the Holy Family Asylum—*your* little girl, Mr. Wiley!"

Still the father had no word. Thad Tanner wiped his glasses. He sighed; it might have been sympathy for the dumb man under the light. Judge Van Hart had rested his head upon his hand. Thad murmured after the pause:

"I think, my friends, the case is proved."

"I think," whispered Michigan, "that you'll be glad for her."

Glad for her! Curran reached out again for Mich's hand. Glad for her! He had been glad for her, and she had led him on, found for him the gold of romance—a man's work, a world of achievement, a life—a soul! Now the phantoms were dissolving. For her he was called to give them up. Even through his dark a voice was calling his renunciation.

"I think, Mr. Curran, you will withdraw. Your daughter, grown to womanhood here; her success, her good name—everything points to your resignation. Ladeau is bought to silence. No other soul, except the persons in this room, knows the real facts. And we—" he glanced at Judge Van Hart—"can keep our counsel. But the price, Curran, is this. I have had a paper drawn up—your announcement of withdrawal. It merely states that for reasons—business and personal—you will not contest the election in the eighteenth congressional district to-morrow."

The man before him muttered. "The meeting . . . the ballots . . . my name—"

The little boss shrugged. "It does not matter. You withdraw—to-night. It will be telegraphed to every precinct in our district. No word of explanation—nothing." The voice was sounding out of a measureless pit to Curran's brain. "Your daughter, Curran. Not to save *yourself,* remember. But ***her,*** your child, who grew up beside you here all unknown."

The fumble of a paper came to Curran's hand. He saw it under the glare of the light above the table.

Dizzy words, typewritten—he could not tell of what. Only he must renounce. The splendid structure of his new self, his worth, his power, his life, had fallen. It was the price of youth's adventure. He would pay.

"The paper," he muttered; and signed it as a dying man might drag a pen across its page. Then he sat back staring. "Thank God," he whispered, "not too late—and she need never know!"

When he arose they did not know his face, so changed was it by agony. The judge saw him cross the street in the sunshine and enter his office. There, the printer and the press boy saw him fumble among the type of his ancient fonts, his lips moving as he worked. He dragged his steps nearer the printer presently. "Box this, Jim—open the front-page form—run it. And get the paper out to-night. I—I'm going." His gray lips whispered.

He moved out slowly, and on the corner in the cold sunshine of the November noon looked at letters of flaming red on the boards of the old opera-house. A farmer had stopped his shaggy-bellied team to spell the wording:

TO-NIGHT!!

OUR CONGRESSMAN!!!

Curran could not make out more. He crept about the corner where the side street led to the foot of the bluff. Creeping, that was the way it seemed, when he reached the trail to the hills.

Her hills! The hills of the Midlands! The place of the best men and women.

hank God," he whispered, " not too late—and she need never know ! "

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BETTER PEOPLE

MANY men of the county drove to town early that day. It was the ever-present restlessness of election eve; and in this instance a sense of new issues, of unusual and dramatic sequences, was in the air. Then it was to be the night of the "big Curran meeting" at the opera-house, the wind-up with red fire and the band; and the country people, with a lively appreciation of the spectacular, were eager to hear the candidate. "Wiley" would make the most of his last chance to scald the "county crowd" with his satire, that was sure. All the day the court-house was thronged with farmers, politicians, candidates, standing about, smoking, gossiping. The dingy central corridor was a reek of tobacco and smells.

Harlan was wont to pass here on his way to his office. He had not concerned himself with the eleventh-hour wrangles and petty intrigues, for he had no opposition in his own fight. The "county crowd would put young Van Hart over," every one said, and approved. The countrymen looked back at him with diffident respect. When he reached Miss Vance's door he saw her at her desk. Hemminger, the lonely insurgent board member from the river district, was there,

sitting, awkward, constrained, holding his hat. Harl
was waving his hand cheerily in passing, when Jan
arrested him with a gesture. Her eyes had a ha
brightness. When the young man came in she ba
him close the door.

Then she sat again. The hubbub of voices in t
hall was lessened.

Janet motioned Harlan to a chair. "We," she beg
quietly, "have been discussing you. Mr. Hemming
and I have discussed you for two weeks."

Harlan looked up at Hemminger with a surpris
smile. "Indeed! Now, I had noticed Hemminger
your office a number of times lately. What is t
extraordinary interest?"

She disregarded his easy banter. "Harlan," s
went on sharply, "you'll be the next prosecuting a
torney."

"Without a doubt. On the first of next month."

She seemed dwelling on the three weeks intervenin
Then: "We are going to confide in you something th
we might have said before; only"—her glance held
curious suspicion—"well, I thought we'd better wa
until after the election. You owe your nominatio
to Tanner, the old crowd, and—well, you'll pardo
my frankness, but we hesitated."

"Hesitated? What on earth are you driving at?"

Hemminger smiled uneasily. "Wondered whe
you'd stand, Mr. Van Hart. Kind o' thought it woul
put you in bad to load *this* on you."

He still looked his wonder at Janet. She was u
locking the drawer of her desk. She took out a
envelope and from it a yellow and worn bit of pape

"We shall demand," she began decisively, "that the first act of your administration is to go before the grand jury and ask for the indictment of Tanner and Dan Boydston and Archie Curry for the giving and the accepting of bribes on the county road contracts for the last six years."

He looked silently at her. Hemminger shifted his hat nervously.

"The proof," Miss Vance went on, "is here." She laid the yellow slip of memoranda on the desk. It was covered with careless entries, figures, abbreviations. To Harlan it meant nothing. "This is Boydston's writing—Boydston, the go-between."

"Those old yarns," Harlan murmured; then her dominance stilled him. He looked again at the paper. "You mean this is—proof?"

"This and Boydston's confession."

"Confession?"

"It amounts to that. His admissions to Hemminger, his fellow board member, on the way the last deal—the Lindstrom Pocket deal—was put through. He admitted he took money—he offered Hemminger five hundred dollars to keep silent on this."

She tapped the paper. Harlan stared at her incredulously. "Why, I saw Boydston coming from the bank not an hour ago. There was a conference of some sort. Father was there, and Tanner and Wiley Curran. There are rumors that Tanner threw up the fight, and wants to make an agreement with Wiley and his league backers to keep their hands off the county committeeship!"

"Boydston," she retorted quietly, "has confessed, two

weeks ago. He dare not tell Tanner. He has
begging, threatening, pleading with Mr. Hemmi
to keep silence, and to destroy this"—she flu
the paper. "Last Tuesday a week ago this was pl
in my hands by a mistake. The silliest thing a l
taker ever did, and only a bungling old farmer
Boydston could have done it. I drove out to
Diecks' place to get a petition that the people
been circulating there to divide their school dis
That is the place Boydston sold to Diecks whe
moved to town. Well, this German had charg
this petition and kept it in a crack of the chim
in Boydston's old sitting-room. When I called
the petition his wife—who can't read a word of E
lish—handed me an envelope, which I did not
at until I came back to town. Then when I wen
file that petition I didn't have it. Instead, these
of memoranda. I couldn't make any sense of th
But there were computations of money paid, and mo
divided, all in Boydston's handwriting. I studie
and the dates, and it struck me curiously that the d
of the transactions tallied with several county bo
meetings. And then it dawned on me like a lightn
flash. I sent for Hemminger, and we compared
notes with his recollections of board transacti
Why, Boydston had actually put Thad's name a
one division of three hundred dollars between h
self and Curry! I couldn't believe such idiocy. T
Hemminger took the memoranda to Boydston
demanded an explanation, and Boydston collapse
his front parlor and admitted it. He lost his n
completely—begged and wept for Hemminger no

show the memoranda—to allow him to settle some way or other; and, above all, not to tell Tanner. Hemminger brought the notes back to me. Ever since we've been wondering—and discussing *you!*"

Harlan met her defiant gaze steadily. "Well?"

"The county crowd put you in. Boydston, in his frenzy, declared it would do us no good to publish the notes. He said the new district attorney was *Tanner's man!* Said we couldn't get it to the grand jury without *you.*"

The young man turned his serious eyes on Hemminger. "Yes?"

"Harlan," put in Janet, "we decided to wait. I consulted no one. I was afraid if we exposed it just before election it would look like a roorback of our people and would hurt Wiley some way or other. You know to attack the best families this way—with Tanner's money and power and the *Mercury-Journal*—well, we could not prove the facts for weeks, and it would look like mere politics on our part. But you"—she watched him coolly—"I made up my mind today I wanted to know what *you'd* do when you're elected."

"Do?" He stared at her with a trace of anger. "Janet, you ask what I'd do? Blow the lid off—send Boydston and Curry to the pen! Tanner, too, if I can get him!"

She looked off through the window at the bank corner. "It will be a tremendous job, Harlan, you, a new man—wholly without experience in office, bucking a combination that no man here ever dared to fight. The money, the influence, the Best People."

He followed her glance out to the country folk idling about the ancient sidewalk of the First National. Farther down High Street, under the leafless maples, he could see the tidy lawns, the prosperous houses, and then his home. The judge was slowly driving in from lunch behind Old Dutch. So long he watched, so imperturbably, that she could not guess the struggle in his mind. Not of right or wrong; but to grasp issues dimly limned beyond. One fights for one's class, one's kind, one's heritage of thought and feeling; basic greed, the instinct to survive, vestigial promptings from feudal privilege to protect and exculpate —all battled in his subconsciousness for delay and pretext and caution.

Hemminger, the pale-eyed countryman, shuffled his feet with nervous apprehension. "I guess there are people out there"—he lifted his bony finger to the hills—"who will be with you in the fight. *Better* people—"

The young man suddenly tipped his chair forward with a smile.

"I thank you for the word, Bert," he smiled. He reached for the memoranda. Janet's eyes silently followed him. Almost a trace of suspicion was in them when Harlan placed the papers in his inner pocket. He arose. "I'm going to see father. He's in his chambers by now."

Janet, too, arose with a sharp protest. But before she voiced it the door burst open. A man reeled in, drunk, in his shirt-sleeves, even though he came from the chill November street. Jim Mims, the *News* printer, stared wildly at them.

"Where's *he* gone? Where's Wiley?"

The printer staggered to Miss Vance's desk. He wiped his unshaven chin, his bleared eyes rolled. "What 'a' you *done* with him?"

"What's the matter?"

He spread a damp and ink-smeared copy of the *News* before her. "There!" he wailed, "*he* told me to run this box on the front page! *I* didn't read it! *He* set it up, he gave it to me. Me and Aleck we run the whole issue off and then started to fold the mail list, when I first read it! I was drunk, that's it, or, damn me, I'd never put the press on it! No, sir, not even if *he* told me!"

They were staring at the *News*.

The "box" enclosed a bold-face type in the center of the sheet: "For Personal and Business Reasons, Wiley T. Curran Withdraws From the Congressional Contest in the Eighteenth District."

Nothing more.

Janet was paling to her lips. In the pause, Harlan seized the paper. "Come!" he shouted and dashed from the room. They followed him, the tramp printer a wailing babbling rear-guard. When he reached the *News* shop he came upon Miss Vance and Hemminger staring at the pile of papers that made up the weekly issue. Young Van Hart was searching feverishly over the editor's desk.

"Not a word," he muttered; "nothing to explain. Has he gone crazy?"

"There's his big meeting to-night," Hemminger blurted. "I hear the band boys practising. But Wiley —God A'mighty! has *he* gone wrong?"

Harlan suddenly turned on them. "That conference! He was called to Tanner's office this morning. I know, for father was there!"

"They—they"—Janet controlled her voice—"smashed him, Harlan! *Somehow,* with *something!* Drove him out of the fight!"

The younger man turned to Hemminger. "Bar that door! Keep Jim and Aleck here. And don't let a paper go out!"

"Press time they'll somebody come 'round," blubbered Jim. "Some old woman, or some of the old preachers whom he always gave papers to for nothing. And the kids to carry 'em, and the four o'clock mail to make!"

Harlan was bolting the rear door. "Hemminger, draw the curtains. Don't let a person in, don't answer any questions. You don't know *anything,* remember!"

Janet threw a blank sheet from the stock shelf over the printed issues of the *News.* Then she turned. "Harlan, do you think this matter of Boydston has anything to do with it?"

"No." He motioned her out the door. "Come. I'm going to father's chambers. There's no court to-day. And I want you, Janet"—he fixed his blue eyes on her fiercely. "Wiley—he and I have not been *friends* of late—but this! If they *broke* him unfairly, dastardly, I'll fight!"

She nodded. She knew the estrangement, knew it as she knew the old rare love of men between them. She had no time to speak until she was with Harlan

again in the court-house, in the judicial chamber just off the hall of justice.

Judge Van Hart was writing at his table. He glanced up with some annoyance; then, at sight of his son, with surprise. At Janet's entry he arose with his old-fashioned courtesy and bowed.

He had no time for speech. Harlan broke out with the wrath of a man past reason. He towered above the judge when he reached the table.

"Father, what did they do to Curran?"

The judge's face flushed and set to the impassive study it wore upon the bench. It was as if he had expected this from his son, as if he had dreaded it. But a tremor was in his voice at the other's menace.

"Mr. Curran has withdrawn."

"Yes, yes! But what did you do?"

"I? My son, I was called into conference with some gentlemen. It—was a matter of importance—party importance—I may say, of immense importance to the community. They wished me—wanted representative men to witness—"

"What did *you* do to Wiley?"

The judge controlled himself by an effort. "Sit down, Miss Vance. I—this—very unfortunate—painful—"

"I wish to know," she said clearly. "We demand to know."

"You were there, father. And he has withdrawn."

A wan smile came to the magistrate. "Very good. I assure you it was voluntary on his part. Embarrassing, doubtless, but"—he tried to smile on in Harlan's

face and failed. "My boy, the truth! Something he dared not face among honest men."

Janet's eyes were blazing. "You accuse him? I demand to know!"

The judge coughed awkwardly. "My dear, it is something you, perhaps, have not heard—this campaign—the heat of politics"—he spoke deprecatingly—he detested politics. "If you will withdraw, I might explain to Harlan. Since he demands it."

"*I* demand it!" she cried. "I shall not go!"

"She shall not go," said Harlan. "Do you know of that old yarn, Janet, that's been bandied about? Of Wiley's—marriage years ago?"

"Yes," she answered calmly. "Heard and forgave. Only—if he had only come to *me* with it!"

"Was that it, father? That!"

"More than that," the judge sighed. It was a delicate affair to mention before women. He had that archaic idea of women which could defend a social economism that sent them to walk the street, but would retreat at the suggestion that they really walked upon legs.

He seated himself. "My boy, I do not know how to begin. The man was sent for. He was told that he was unfit to represent this sober and moral constituency at Washington. He was shown that the truth once out would defeat him among our people, even at this late day."

"The truth?" shouted Harlan; "let's have the truth!"

"The gentlemen discussed the affair with him. He defied them. We then proved to his satisfaction that

this—marriage—resulted in issue. That he had a child, in fact—living. And *here!*"

They watched him ceaselessly. He fingered with a paper-knife, and glanced out the window. It was distressing to be annoyed by having to tell the truth. Janet moved at last, breaking the spell upon them all.

"I do not believe—" she muttered, and then looked at the judge with stubborn courage. "Well, then I *do!* And is that all?"

"Another detail. This child of his is the girl whose notoriety has set the town by the ears for two seasons, Aurelie Lindstrom."

They did not answer. Then he heard his son whisper: "It's a lie!" But Harlan had turned from them to the wall.

"He has admitted it. It was proven to his own complete confession."

Without the window the sparrows twittered, and the fragmentary music of the band practise came to the room. Along the street and in the Square, the group could see the passing country people, the teams; and hear the moving of steps in the court-house corridor.

Janet spoke again. Always her calmness prevailed. "How admitted it?"

The judge shrugged uneasily. "You just came to tell me that he had withdrawn. Is that not enough? What answer can you demand more?"

The woman had arisen. She looked at her watch. From the room she could see the *News'* front windows; the door shut, Hemminger's face appearing once when a lad demanded entrance and was refused. Her head was aching with the press of bewildering prob-

lems. Some way out, some light, something to break the hopelessness of it all! She could look down the street to the opera-house, the gathering country people reading the bill-boards.

"Ah, well!" She turned: "I will have to believe it, Judge Van Hart! I thank you. I—I—" she stared at Harlan. He must have sat without a sound. He was by the table, his head resting on his hands. Something like a whispered cry came from him when Janet moved toward the door. When her fingers were on the knob, his voice arrested her.

"Don't go, Janet! In God's name, let me think! Aurelie—*Aurelie!*"

The father was staring at him in his turn. It seemed to the woman that the judge's face was graying. He reached to touch his boy's arm and could not, his hand dropping uselessly.

"My son," he quavered, "what do you mean? *Aurelie?* His child—and *you?*"

The other man raised his head. "I love her—that is all."

He arose and faced them. "Know it now, all of you!" His stubborn speech forced its way between set teeth. "And Wiley—God help Wiley! I *understand!* I'm going to him—*going—going!*"

He found his hat and was rushing to the door when Janet stopped him.

"Wait! I want you, Harlan."

"I'm going to Wiley. They beat him down with this! His life's ambition, his hope—he renounced it all for *her!* I see *that,* Janet!"

"Yes. But here—you can save him!"

"Save him?"

"Does he want the truth known? Do *you* want it known? You love her, Harlan!"

He stopped. The judge raised his hand dispassionately. Janet hurried on: "You can save him. Tanner's out there—I saw him when I came in, talking with the sheriff. In the corridor! Bring him."

Harlan stared. "I'll kill him!" he muttered. Then she saw a light break on his face. He was gone.

They stood face to face, Janet and the magistrate, when Harlan returned. They had not spoken. The judge appeared unnerved at last. Tanner put a curious face in the door. When Harlan closed it behind him, he started in a grinning trepidation. The younger man motioned him to the table. He laid upon it the pages from Boydston's slip. Then he turned to the little gray boss and quietly, as if beginning an address to a jury, he spoke:

"In January, a year ago, you paid Dan Boydston two hundred and fifty dollars to be divided with Curry and another supervisor for putting through the contract you got for building the Broad Creek bridge. On April the second of this year, you paid Boydston four hundred dollars to secure the road contracts in district six—and in June you paid him five hundred dollars to award your company the Sinsinawa Creek dam work. And before that," he glanced over the slips, "you have bribed two, and possibly three, of the board for the last seven years to put road and bridge work not where the county wanted it, but where it was most profitable to you. I am going to bring all these instances before the January grand jury."

The little boss had stood hat in hand, his cigar cocked downward, listening. He never moved until the recital was done. Then with a grimace, he tilted the cigar. His eyes shifted to Janet Vance.

"Where did you get *them* facts?"

"Do they read right?"

"I ain't saying anything. But where did you get them figgers?"

"Boydston confessed."

The judge was staring. Tanner took a step nearer on the rug. He adjusted his glasses critically.

Harlan's hand came down on the table before him. "Don't touch that paper!"

"Young man, I ain't no ruffian. Le' me see." He looked slowly.

"Boydston's writing, isn't it?"

"I'm not saying. I'm not talking. Only," he looked past Janet to the judge. "What the hell do *you* want, young man?"

"I want you to say!"

"I ain't saying anything. You must have gone crazy."

Harlan was folding over the notes in his pocket-book. "All right, Thad! Don't! But I'll be district attorney on the first of next month!"

The little boss took out his cigar. "Judge," he grinned, but his lips were trembling, "what the hell we got into!"

The judge suddenly burst from them with a groan. "Tanner! Don't speak to me—don't *look* at me, I tell you!"

The boss rubbed his chin and watched Harlan. "I

never could account for folks. For the day before election things are moving into a mighty rumpus! Look at the folks in town? I been waiting half an hour for the boy to bring me a copy of the *News*."

"And I," retorted Harlan, "am waiting here for the paper you have in your pocket. Curran's signed withdrawal."

"Eh?" The boss fidgeted. His eyes went to the judge. "You told them!"

"I did. Tanner, this is damnable! This is an outrage," the judge turned on Harlan. "My boy, you misunderstand me. I knew nothing—*know* nothing. The *hate* of this"—he shivered—"God, it is in my blood, our very blood, Harlan! The dirt, the turmoil, the sensationalism of it all."

"Father, I did not dream you did. You brought me up in the reverence of the law—its spiritual quality, its invincible purity. I could not dream dishonor of you. But you—you hesitate. You stand still. It is not enough in a man—not enough in a judge. The only good is the fighting good."

"What do you mean?"

"I want Curran's withdrawal. I demand it."

"He is out of the fight. He dare not speak to-night! His own paper is printing his resignation!"

"Give me that resignation," Harlan advanced on Tanner. "Give it to me—or I'll take it from you."

The boss retreated. He looked toward the door. Janet was moving to it. "Keep off, damn you!" he growled.

Harlan was following him. Thad's hand went into his coat pocket. "Keep off! Here then, make a trade.

Gi' me that stuff of Boydston's, I tell you! I'll keep my mouth shut, if you gi' me that stuff that damn fool wrote!"

"Well!" Harlan's grim smile came. The little gray boss reached a trembling hand from his pocket. From the door Janet turned. She had torn the paper from Tanner, even as Harlan was searching for his own.

"Go!" she cried. "That's enough. Those notes are mine, Harlan. You *can't* trade them!"

Harlan's smile deepened. With a sweep of his hand he hurled Tanner against the wall. "You rat!" He looked back to his father. "I want you all to listen. I am going to marry Aurelie Lindstrom. I am going to prosecute Boydston and Curry and Tanner. And if you"—he smashed the other man closer to the floor—"if you ever mention—or if I ever hear a word against the name of the girl I'm going to marry, I'll walk into the First National Bank and kill you. Is that plain?"

The little boss struggled to answer.

The judge laid a hand on his son's arm. "Harlan! *Marry* her? Your family—your mother—"

The young man gave him a brief attention. "Very good." He lifted the little gray boss to his feet. "Tanner, my father wouldn't kill a man under any circumstances, would he? It's been bred out of him, and his generations before him. But I've got it back somewhere! If there's any need at any time!"

He kicked the door open and threw the boss out.

There was some commotion in the corridor, so much so that Thad's exit was not noticed. An excited boy was dashing down the hall calling for Marryat, the sheriff.

He could not find him, and stopped before Harlan at the door.

"Mr. Van Hart, they want you or some officer! There was a big fight at the quarry! The contractors' dagos tried to sneak into Lindstrom's field and start work, and he shot into 'em. He killed three, and one's the foreman!"

At Harlan's back the judge was listening. The young man saw something out of the window as he turned. A column of white smoke going up from the back yard of the *News'* shop; and a glimpse of Janet's gown. He just realized that she had gone. And that, for the first time in fifty years, there would be no issue of the Rome *News.*

The boy was pulling at his sleeve in a hysterical excitement.

"Hold on, I'm going, son!" But he turned again to his father. The judge was striving to speak.

"He said *Lindstrom!* He said *Lindstrom! Killed* the men!"

"You sent him down," the son muttered briefly. "I'm sorry, father!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRICE IS PAID

AT sunset Curran was far in the hills. There was a tiny hunting shack in the thick of an oak-scrub ridge where he had often spent the night in other seasons, with Harlan or Arne, seeking the squirrels and wild pigeons, and now, unconsciously, his steps led thither. Without thought, without purpose—only he must be alone with his crisis of defeat; he must keep reason, he must grope for the tatters life had left him.

All the afternoon he had wandered, keeping from the roads, and meeting no one. He had beheld the silent Midland country, the cloud patches chasing one another over the close-cropped meadows from ridge to ridge, the valleys bleak in the November hush. Afar he heard the farmers snapping the corn from the frozen husks, throwing it with a rough cadence against the bump boards of the wagons; and now and then he saw the yellow piles among the shocked fodder and the pumpkin vines. Again he saw a threshing crew, the red machine roaring, the flow of chaff, the glint of the fork tines as the pitchers threw the bundles to the band-cutters; the farm boys wallowing in the bright straw, the girls coming out to bid the hands to dinner which the neighbor women had gathered to prepare.

All this fine hearty life seemed strangely unreal, but curiously his mind absorbed itself in it. He pictured the long table in the farmhouse, the host welcoming the threshers, the discussion of the yield and price with the weighers and sack sewers, as the owner let the brown wheat run through his fingers. All this he had been giving up with his new larger life; this prosy country friendliness which only this year he had discovered and loved, and which had made place for him, given him honor. And now, at the moment of his miracle, the precious knowledge of their trust, and that he was equal to this man's work, he had fallen; again, the wanderer, the man without understanding, the poet without song.

He turned from it all with tear-filled eyes, climbing higher in the bluffs. The leaves were new-fallen, showing the far-winding river, the bronze shields of the corn coming up to the black muddy roads leading to the town, first past the modest homes of the workers and hired folk, and then to the heavy-faced houses of the rich. After all, a pleasant friendly town, coming at last to know him; a wholesome town blown always with odorous airs, and filled with the voices of young people, boys climbing the cattle trails, sweethearts wandering along the pebbly watercourses of Sunday afternoons; or old men and women coming slowly along the walks under the arching maples, speaking kindly, knowing every one and the children of every one.

From the last high ridge, where the uplands began, he could see the great vistas. The smoke over the mines and factories in Earlville, the Mississippi, a band

of dull silver strung along the hills of Illinois; and now, on his home shore, far to the north, a single farm wagon toiling up the red gash of a road to the yellow bluff, then rattling on, a crawling speck at last, the wrapped figure in the seat alone and desolate under the sky, the low-pressing globe of gray. He thought it might be his friend, Hemminger, going back to his home people. He would tell them the news. He wondered how they would receive it; if they would not be saddened? They would open their weekly paper, the damp and soggy little sheet as it came from his old press, and read his announcement. The talk would go about,—some nameless blight that had struck down their champion, and only the infinite silence would answer. He thought of the farmers driving homeward from the rally that would not take place, rough-garbed, silent, in a sort of awe of Thad Tanner, the little gray boss who was on top again. They would guess at this much. But Curran who, somehow, had appealed to their own secret sentiment: who had come clearing an obscure message, the fighting good, the newer ideal of democracy—something past the money lust of the republic—he, who had dreamed that out of their gray and honest lives he might weave the colors of his own infinite possibilities—what would they think of him?

To-morrow was the election, and by night the great fight would be won. They would all win, Delroy, the militant governor, the junior senator; all the men of the North in the brilliant campaign. But he who had been of them, of whom the home folk had been proud as he voiced their conscience against outworn theories of wealth and privilege, he had fallen. He thought of

how they would discuss him to-morrow about the polls, his useless name on the ballots—a man apart, branded with a nameless stain, the eternal whisper following him. Yes, he had found bottom after the resurge of his life. He had risen to fall. Love had made the way and then defeated him.

From the high point he saw a yellow scar and knew it was the quarry, with beyond the shanties of the Pocket squatters. Up this trail *she* had romped and grown, his child, his little girl, laughing the way of her vulgar upbringing, all unknown and uncared for. And he—he might have done so much—he who all his thriftless life had needed the touch of a hand in his!

He tried to recall the first time he had seen her,—a dark-haired child in a red dress going past his shop with the barelegged Lindstrom boys. Then a schoolgirl, slim, with sharp-eyed little Gallic tricks and poses; and then the maid he had come to know. Moody at times, and lonely; passionate still with eagerness to live and be. And thence on to his miracle—laughing her way into his dreams, the bizarre romance in his obscure struggle, lifting him by her kinship of feeling, of adventure, of follies and extravagances. Oh, the way they had come unknowing!—the two outcasts to their triumph!

Then he bowed his head with humbleness at this other miracle. With all her droll playing with him, her grateful fondness for him, he had been the pure in heart. The wonder of it! That always, his passion had been a sheltering and protecting one—a fatherhood, indeed, that defended her against the town's tongues, that exulted in her success. And once again

he looked off to the east and his mystic impulse came. He kissed his fingers to the dun sky and whispered: "Because you're there, Aurelie—just because you're there!"

At dark he went to the cabin, and before a tiny fire sat long. A morrow was to be thought of—a sober reckoning to-morrow, the long straight road. He would have to go, he reasoned; he was crushed, destroyed here. And then a flame of dogged courage swept him. No, he would not go! He had done no wrong. Fate had struck him down, but he accepted. He would make his fight—a losing fight, perhaps—with the infinite cruelty of ostracism and the jeers of misunderstanding; the mutter of nameless things that men whisper only to their kind, always about him. But he would stay; he would steel his soul to it, with some sort of new patience and pride in renunciation that none could know. Unless it was best for her! Then he would go, gladly the wanderer; silent, crying down his fatherhood, his lonely love for her. For she had best not know he whispered—never, never! What need of this burden on her?

In the dark he groped about this circle, and nothing could he find except that what was for her, he would do. Nothing else would matter. Then he slept, as he had not dreamed he could sleep, in a child's peace; or as one who had emptied his soul, beholding a flame burn it out to purity. Once, in the night, he awakened and found his lips muttering: "Thank God!" and then slept again in his inexplicable peace. Only, on this consciousness, there seemed to come sounds, faint and far, like the firing of a shot now and then.

When dawn came he arose, hungry and stiffened with weariness and cold, but with a cleansed hunger, a somber resolve, a feeling of the need of men. When he came out the low-pressing gray of the sky was still on the hills. He looked down and saw a farm wagon on the far valley road. It came to him that this was election day, and about the polls the groups were gathering. But on the hush of the morning there came again sounds that he could dimly recall in his dreams—gunshots. Once they were almost like a volley.

Now, on his descent to town, he could see black distant figures, men moving out the road along the creek.

CHAPTER XXV

THE COMMUNAL LAW

IT was still very early when Curran left the trail in the road back of his cottage and came down past it to the *News* shop. The housekeeper was not about. He wondered at that; she must be sleeping later than usual. In the back yard was a heap of burned paper ash that puzzled him. He came through the shop, opened the front door and looked out.

The Square was deserted. One or two clerks were setting out the vegetable crates and displays, but around the hitching-rail there was not a team, nor all down High Street a human being. Curran was surprised—it must still be very early.

Then about the corner by the bank a stiffened lame old figure crept. Curran regarded Uncle Michigan in surprise. His eyes had the look of a hunted animal, staring above his shaggy beard.

"Mr. Wiley!"

"Uncle Mich!"

"I'm goin' to the station to meet her, Mr. Wiley. I telegraphed last night, and she'll done come to save Knute and Peter and the baby!"

"Save them? Mich!"

"They done give John three hours more. Then if

he don't surrender they'll charge the house and riddle it! And John he won't let the children come out—or any one. He says the Lord is wi' the right!"

Curran was staring in his turn. "Mich! What is it?"

The old soldier looked at him with a remembrance. "I forgot, Mr. Wiley! Where you ben? Folks were askin' fo' you—they said if ary man in the county could talk reason to John, it's you!"

"Look here—has there been any trouble—any fighting?"

"Fight! *Where* have you been! Started last evening. Why, it done break up your meetin', didn't it! The whole county just poured out there. They had a time getting the bodies dragged off—worked all night, and two more deputies were shot at midnight; and then this morning the folks got Marryat to go try another parley with John—and he killed the *sheriff*, Mr. Wiley!"

The editor clenched his hands. "I heard—I *know*, now!"

"The posse is all around the place. I sneaked away at dark and come to town to telegraph Aurelie. The deputies are keeping the crowd back to the creek road. Everybody's there—all the town folks and the farmers that drove in to hear you. God A'mighty, what a' election day! They ain't a man thought of *it* yet! Five of 'em been killed, Mr. Wiley, and the sheriff's body is lying there yet. John's fired at every one who shows himself."

"And they've fired at the house!"

"Yes. Mebbe killed some o' the boys. John's got it

all barricaded. He can fight from any window—and they got to cross that field where he can drop any one."

Curran was hurrying with him. The shock of the matter had driven every thought of himself from his mind. They passed a man or two who hardly looked at them. Curran could not tell whether it was the palsy of the tragedy, or the contempt in which they must hold him to-day when all the state would be ringing with his downfall.

When they reached the Junction, a crowd was waiting for the train. He heard snatches of the talk. Men were gaunt and hollow-eyed. "Heard somebody'd wired the governor to send militia. . . . No, they ain't coming—Mr. Van Hart says it would be a *disgrace* if the county can't handle this affair. Folks say the governor ain't his politics—and *he* wouldn't call on him if half the county was killed. . . . Marryat was a fool to try to draw up on the house when John had just told him to stay off. And District Attorney Jewett threw up his hands—said *he* was going out of office, and *he* wasn't going to monkey with it. So they all went to young Van Hart—*he's* in charge of it!"

The two, watching for the nine o'clock train from Chicago to draw out of the creek cut, heard this endless babble. Teams drove by on their way to the quarry. Women were crying. The "local" from Earlville brought four correspondents of mid-west papers who were being hounded for "follow" stories. The affair had already been flashed nation-wide. Last night's battle was in all the Chicago papers which got early editions to the river towns at daylight. It was a sensation—this story of a one-armed outlaw, crazed

with religious brooding, driven to desperation by his wrong of the law, fortifying his cabin and defying the community to take him. Five men dead and eight wounded; the shanty riddled again and again, but the defender unhurt, and refusing all parley, all demands to surrender. The news shot through the staid and sober Midland counties like a drama from the ancient and lawless West; it wrested attention even from the momentous election.

Curran listened to Michigan's bewildered recital, and to the fragments of talk. The throng grew. Some said two companies of militia were coming; that the hastily summoned county deputies were hopelessly inefficient, scared, "bluffed" out by Lindstrom's merciless shooting and the number of the dead.

"Nobody wants to tackle him," said a breathless clerk from the Hub Clothing Store. "Some of the boys thought they could sneak around in the timber and get a shot at him close, and he wounded three of them before they could lift a finger!"

"And they could hear a woman crying in the house. And a boy—must be that little Dane kid, Peter!"

Old Michigan was fearsomely listening. "If she comes," he breathed, "to save Peter and the baby!"

"They won't fire the house, Mich."

"They will! Young Mr. Van Hart said they will. He give 'em a chance to surrender—he's give 'em *three* chances to surrender—and John won't hear of it. And Mr. Harlan said not an hour ago, there'd be one more chance! Then he'll charge that place if fifty men are killed. The law, Mr. Wiley—he says it'll be upheld at all costs, no difference who is hurt!"

"Harlan," muttered Wiley, "I—I—wish I could see him. Beg him—ah, well!" he stared at the depot crowd. He was thinking of that dogged and invincible quality he had seen grow in Harlan. He knew. He had felt its power—under all else lay this Viking ruthlessness. Yes, if it lay with Harlan, he would not hesitate. The way of peace with him was the law vindicated.

But it was curious, in all the turmoil, that no one noticed him—the obsession of the tragedy must have obscured even the sensation of his downfall. He tried to buy a paper but none was to be had. Through all the complaints and recriminations, denunciation of the county officers for not doing something, he became aware of this amazement that no one questioned him. He met Mowry, the undertaker, in his long black coat and string tie, and Mowry had no thought except a grievance of his own. The Widow Steger had passed, and—just his luck—passed in the hospital at Burlington where her son-in-law had embalmed her. And here Mowry had been buying his groceries of Dickinson for nine years in expectation of getting the widow.

"Dog-gone it, Wiley, this is a sorehead town! It's irritatin' when folks won't patronize home industries. I'm going out to Californy where Hen and Ben are bottlin' mineral water. They say there is a great openin' for an undertaker in their town—if they ever get their mineral water to sellin'."

But nothing about Curran's withdrawal. From this riddle his tired brain revolved to Aurelie's coming. How should he meet her—what word say of his downfall? His soul was crying to her out of the dawn of

peace the night had given him. He had accepted, he had renounced—but he feared his self-control when she would look in his eyes with her pretty fondness, her laughing trust. His little girl, and his heart was big with the new fatherhood! And with it all came the old mutter to his dry lips: "She must not know—she must not know! That, too, dear God, I can accept!"

There was another excited rumor. The crowd swayed and buzzed—another deputy was wounded out at the quarry. And the officers were fighting the unmanageable spectators, helpless, without leadership. Van Hart had knocked a man down when he found him selling whisky to his posse. He had ordered four more jailed for disobedience in crossing the dead-line. He was battling for order, for law—and he was not even yet in office. But the old dry-bones of county officialdom were helpless—they had begged the judge to send his son out to the siege.

Above all this gossip Curran saw Janet Vance's serene face. She was in a touring car which Arne drove to the depot. Wiley stared at the legend on its side: "Curran For Congress! Vote to-day!!!" The Vances did not see him until he placed his hand on the car, his eyes fixed on the banner.

"Janet!" His voice died. "Take *this* off! Don't you know?"

Her face lit with joy. "Wiley! But this is terrible. The community never passed such a night. And never such a day. Arne is swearing mad—there isn't a voter at the booth in your precinct—the town's emptied itself out there."

He followed her gesture to the hills. "I didn't mean *that,* Janet! I mean—well, didn't you see the *News* last night?"

"Yes," she answered clearly—and smiled. He stared wildly at her. "And my meeting? I—wasn't there!"

"Neither was any one else! Some people gathered, and the committee waited. Then Purcell announced it was off. He said you must be out in the crowd around Lindstrom's. Anyhow, it didn't make any difference to any one."

"But, Janet! I—I—you know? You *must* know—"

And then her hand closed over his on the seat. "Hush!" she whispered, "I *know.* And no one else!"

And while he stared again at her, unable to make it out, Arne arose from cranking his car. "Get in there, Wiley! They want you—they been asking for you! Where the devil did you disappear to last night? But the whole campaign went in the air when Lindstrom cut loose with his gun!"

They had him whirling out the road with Arne continuing his imprecations on the misfortune. Michigan was with them—they promised to be back for the belated train. "Some of the town women and the ministers want you to get to Harlan," shouted Arne, "and ask him, for God's sake, to get the children out before he attacks John's house. The whole thing fell on Harlan, somehow. Old Jellybelly Jewett blew up after the sheriff was killed. The citizens said somebody had to take charge of the posse—it was demoralized. They put it up to Harlan, and he's fighting some order out of the mob!"

They came upon the blond-headed young man who,

in a night, had come to have authority in his manner—that tacit authority past all trappings of office which men acknowledge in crises. He stood by the road a hundred yards outside the Lindstrom fence. All along this fence, and stretching into the woods, was the hastily summoned posse, armed with shotguns, rifles, revolvers—with all the mob-inefficiency of a community unused to the issues of force. Among the woods and on the bridge across Sinsinawa Creek, and all along the way to town, were buggies, motor-cars, horsemen, pedestrians, coming out and straggling back. The coroner's men had been there, and all evidences of Lindstrom's bloody work had been removed. In the fence corners, fires were going; the deputies, chilled from the all-night vigil, were making coffee. Newsboys from Earlville were now going among the crowds crying papers; and these and the deputies eating and some laughing nervously with one another, gave the affair the aspect of a huge grotesque picnic. They hurled quips at one another's courage, and taunts to the embryo war correspondents who hurried back to the telegraph offices, and then came on to question leading citizens, and to badger Harlan Van Hart, the prospective district attorney, who seemed in control. Murmurs were heard. Why wasn't something done? Who fired the last shot? It was getting ridiculous, this waiting and arguing and considering. The Chicago newspaper men, who just arrived, were laughing over the blundering and inefficiency. Some of the deputies had secured whisky and were already drunk.

Arne Vance's machine reached Harlan just as this word was brought. Curran saw his eye set coldly; he

was glancing along his disorderly cordon by the fence. He seemed about to ride down the line, and then he looked at his watch.

"Harlan," cried Arne, "we brought Wiley back!"

Curran was conscious that Janet, at his side, and Harlan were looking at each other with a significant silence. He was going to speak to Harlan, when that young man slowly motioned to him to leave the machine. He descended and went along the rail fence from the others.

"Wiley," muttered Harlan, "will you go in there?"

Wiley glanced at the Lindstrom fort, a gray and silent frame shack in the midst of the corn stubble; a stack, a broken-down wagon, and the well-house. No sign of life, nothing, yet from a window here and there, with bewildering ubiquity, the deadly rifle-shots had rung whenever a man had approached. "John will treat with you. He swore you were the only man in the county he would trust. I rode near an hour ago and delivered our message. Gave him two hours to surrender or take the consequences."

"Harlan, those children!"

"I know. And his wife—and that sneak of a Frenchman is there. But—" he glanced at the townspeople resolutely, "*they* left it to me—and I'll not endure this! Dead or alive, we'll take him this morning—and I'll not answer for any one. I'll lead the boys when the rush comes, Wiley!"

The elder man looked up at him. "Yes. I'd expect you." He was seeking an answer in Harlan's eyes—Harlan must know—*surely* he knew! But Curran

could not speak, so great was the press of this other greater matter.

Harlan put out his hand. "Wiley, I depend on you. If they can be saved—it will be *you!*"

Curran looked about. Some notion that Harlan was doggedly suffering under the covert gibes of the spectators at the safe distance—the mob who knew nothing of the exigencies of the case—came to him. Some idea that the day would be crucial for the younger man, if he flinched under the responsibility.

"I'll go," he answered, and for the first time since his own tragedy began, a trace of the old friendly smile came to his lips. At the fence he called back: "And if he does not come?"

"The law will have to take its course. I promise nothing!"

Curran drew a white handkerchief from his pocket as he crossed the field. He was vaguely aware that Arne Vance's machine had turned down the creek road back to town. But keener still was the impression that the thousands of eyes were watching him. Presently he heard a murmur among the deputies, taken up, growing, spreading to the masses of people away beyond. He did not look back. They knew him, they would recognize him, the recreant, the fallen man of the county who would have been their leader. Even when a straggling shout went up, he did not turn; it rang with a wild hysterical note, primal with hostility it seemed to Curran. Then the watchers saw him reach the house, pause at the door, and be admitted.

The throng began to murmur again, and shift. But many stared silently at the house in the bleak field.

John had not fired at "Curran of the *News*". They began to mutter and argue explanations. The correspondents went off to put more "stuff" on the wire about this turn of affairs. And after fifteen minutes, that seemed an hour, they saw Wiley Curran come out of the house. He seemed pleading; and they saw a boy's tow head in the door. And presently, Curran came on. He crossed the field in a great silence. Even the nearer people did not crowd up to listen when he reached Harlan sitting his horse on the creek road. Curran spoke quietly, yet it seemed his voice reached them all, so acute the stillness.

"He will not surrender. I pleaded every point. Told him that Lafe Mason offered to defend him. That he'd have a fair trial. That our people were people of the law—they would give him justice. I begged for his wife and children. But he told his old story. The land was his. No man could put foot on it until he was paid. He told his old grievance. The law sent him to jail—it made him what he was. Never again would he face man's justice—God was the supreme judge—and not Van Hart."

Van Hart's son was pale. There seemed challenge and indictment in the other's tone. He gathered his reins tighter. "Well, we'll take him."

"Harlan—in God's name—those children!"

"He had his choice."

"Wait—" Curran stepped nearer, then faced as if to the others.

Harlan turned in the saddle. He lifted his hand solemnly. "No more. There is your answer—there is the law! The *people!* Ask them, Wiley!"

Curran glanced back, an impulse to make a last passionate outcry to something, he knew not what. But the people—the Midlanders, indomitable, contained, unfearing the final issues of nothing. Their land, their law—their Saxon strength had won and made it through bloody centuries. The man standing alone seemed to read their will. He checked his cry. What would it be but the cry of a broken man, a discredited leader?—himself without place among them? They had not spoken now at the crisis—they had approved by this silence. Curran bowed his head in a sorrow that only the light of heart may know.

Then, with a swift remembrance, he stretched his hands to Harlan.

"For God's sake, boy! Wait—Aurelie is coming! And you love her, Harlan!"

But the other man had galloped down the road, speaking to a group here and there. The deputies sprang up in a straggling line. Some one up in the quarry face fired a shot, and a shout rang from the farther woods. The man by the fence watched them silently. He turned to look at the people. They, too, were still, steadfast; absorbed as if, from a mighty arena, under the gray stare of the sky, they, the rulers, the arbiters, watched a drama—the conflict of eternal forces which would destroy what they ordained to destroy, and save what they ordained to be saved. That was the communal law, the social compact. He who set himself against it would perish. Curran felt its inexorableness—he, too, had defied it—and it had bided its time to destroy him.

CHAPTER XXVI

LET THERE BE PEACE

JANET and Arne had yielded to Old Michigan's entreaties that they speed back to the Junction to meet the Chicago train. Aurelie would come—he clung to it with a sheer and piteous obstinacy, she would come! They followed the old man as he pressed through the crowd to reach the cars.

"Done come," he was muttering. "Always she done come when I call!"

Then they saw his worn eyes light. Aurelie was on the step, descending. And behind her, leading a brindle bull-pup and looking the last word of perplexed embarrassment, was Rube Van Hart. Behind him was a pink-faced and immaculate young gentleman who also seemed amazed at the instant murmur that went up from the throng. They all knew her and knew in a flash that the tragedy at Lindstrom's place had summoned her.

She threw herself with a cry of joy into Uncle Mich's arms, her face buried in his tobacco-colored whiskers, and the long-stemmed roses she had carried now scattered over his shoulders. A vision such as Rome, Iowa, had never seen outside of the tin opera-house. Even her proper traveling costume could not

subdue her love of colors or repress her ingenuous sense of blossom time, all that eager, palpitant young life sprung from the gray soil of penury to bill-poster grandeur! She all but upset Uncle Michigan off his peg-leg with her affection, overwhelming him with little cries and explanations.

And all the time Rube Van Hart, who had met her returning from Earlville, where he had been on a horse trade for Carmichael, stood there dangling the gold-collared bulldog. As he told the express agent, he had been captured, bound and gagged, and had been desperately hoping for a wreck before the train got to where home folks could see him lassoed to a violet-smelling bull-pup and an actress lady! Aurelie had come back to the old town with her bull-pup and her press-agent.

Uncle Michigan and Rube fought a way for her to Arne Vance's motor-car. The young gentleman from the Cohan & Snitz publicity bureau followed. It was worth his job to lose sight of Aurelie. There had been a tremendous row when the western managers for Cohan & Snitz received a telephone message from Aurelie at midnight that she would not play at the next day matinée, because she was going out to Iowa where her "folks had shot somebody". They had roared and cursed and dashed after her in a taxicab only to find that she had dashed ahead of them to the union station. Only young Mr. Kaiser had made the train, and immediately the Cohan & Snitz people had wired him at every station to make the most of it. Great press stuff, this! The comedienne of *The Girl and the Burglar* going out at midnight to settle the cause

célèbre that all the West was agog about. They rushed another girl into the part and then began to boom the "press end".

Young Mr. Kaiser yelled his futile protests when he saw Aurelie lifted into the car. He snatched at the tonneau and Arne Vance pounded him over the fingers and howled: "You get off, damn you!"

They dashed away, and the press-agent, seizing the bull-pup from Rube, ran for the nearest conveyance. "Follow 'em," he shouted. "Keep track of that girl!"

On the way out he wearily confided in the hackman. "Take it from me, chasing Miss Lindstrom around over these United States is some work. She wanted to stop the Empire State Express one time so that the water wouldn't splash in her stateroom bath tub, and denounced the conductor all the way to New York when he refused. Say, if I could get over half the real stories I know about her with the city editors, I'd be made on Broadway!"

"Hey?" retorted the hackman. "Used to see that kid sellin' skinned rabbits at the grocery not so many years ago. Young man, if you want stories about Aurelie Lindstrom, right here's the place!"

"Keep a-going!" yelled the publicity man; "if she gets out of sight most *anything's* liable to break—and I've got to make the three o'clock editions with a column on her!"

Arne's machine tore into the long leafless stretch of creek road where the first of the watchers began to appear in the buggies and carts. Then the people on foot, a throng thickening until the road was blocked; and the dyspeptic farmer-student, swearing at them, leaped

out and kicked away a panel of the rail fence. He sent the big car smashing through and it went lunging over the rough and frozen ploughed land. Aurelie had sat very still and pale, holding to Uncle Michigan's hand. She seemed swiftly understanding it all, the masses of people, the sense of impending horror, the acute crisis. Uncle Michigan had been trying to tell her; Janet Vance was endeavoring to explain; and her big black eyes grew wider and brighter.

And suddenly from the woods ahead there came the spatter of rifle-shots. Janet put her hands to her ears.

"They want you, Aurelie! Maybe you can—maybe you *can!* He would not listen to Wiley, but maybe you—"

She turned swiftly. "Mr. Curran, where is he?"

Janet ceased. She had almost forgotten in the whirl of events. Dumbly she watched the girl, striving to guess her thought. Curran, crushed with his agony, out there making his last appeal—and Aurelie, sitting upright staring now at the battle-field, her eyes searching for him. She had *asked* for him! And slowly an infinite pity came to Janet's heart—Aurelie, what was she thinking?

When the machine ground past a fence corner a man leaped out waving a shotgun.

"Hold on! You can't go farther! Van Hart said no one could go closer! They're going to riddle that house next time Lindstrom fires a shot!"

Arne jerked his throttle wider and dashed past. "They're closing in. Oh, Janet—they're closing in! Where's Harlan—look for him!"

"Harlan?" Aurelie arose, her hostile eyes leveled at

the line of deputies climbing the fence. "Go on—go on!" she cried.

The guards were yelling at them. From the creek side of the field another shot rang out. Janet, looking that way, saw Harlan mounted, motioning to the men. Then from Lindstrom's house came the spurt of a gun, and one of Harlan's group fell face downward at his feet. They scattered.

"Arne," his sister whispered, "get word to him—to Harlan, that she's here."

He stopped the big car with a jerk. And as he was climbing out, with the whir of the machine, and the warning shouts of the deputies in their ears, they did not notice that Aurelie had slipped from the other side. Not until Old Michigan raised a cry did Janet turn to see the open door behind her.

Thirty feet away Aurelie was running. She had thrown her furs from her, scattering the roses among the frozen clods, and was flying onward to her old home two hundred yards across the field. The deputies were shouting. Arne saw her now. He turned to follow. Janet sprang out, a cry on her lips. Old Michigan uprose, calling his pleadings.

Janet stopped. There was nothing she could do. The panorama was spread before her like a moving picture: the bleak corn-stubbled field, the gray little house detached in the winter sunlight, a film of smoke over its gable; and on all three sides of it a straggling line of men advancing, firing here and there, yelling insanely, loading to fire again. The spatter of shots thickened; it became a volley; the blue smoke hid the farther fence, the masses of people far beyond under

the leafless trees. From the gable of Lindstrom's house came a single report, sharp from its nearness. A man of the line went down.

She saw Harlan coming with the posse from the other side. Her brother was running faster, but Aurelie was far beyond him flying on with her old woodland litheness. Then another figure caught Janet's eye. Wiley Curran had leaped the fence from among the deputies and had outstripped them. He was shouting; and the angle of his course would cut Aurelie off from the house. Janet cried out to him. She saw the men beyond the house, under Harlan's orders, stopping to fire coolly, deliberately, at the window from which Lindstrom was riddling the deputies.

Then came the crash of a volley louder than all else. And she saw her brother stop short midway between her and the veil of smoke. He was staring at a patch of color, maroon and glistening black plumes, against the gray of the guns and the wintry woods.

In the moment's intermission following the volley they saw a man step from the door,—a tall grim figure, staggering in the acrid haze of the powder smoke and then coming on alone, upright, majestic.

Aurelie was flying to him. The outlaw did not stop —she flung herself against him, clasping him, looking up; and John merely put his stub of an arm about the girl, holding her close as if to shelter her, and came on, his Winchester swinging up to his other shoulder as he strode.

He fired squarely into the line of his advancing enemies. A man dropped; he fired again, again, again, cool, sure, merciless, the mutter of a prayer upon his

lips, the pleadings of the girl within his ears. But he would not stop. The God who ruled above man's petty justice was with him; he had come forth to save his wife and children from the hurricane of bullets slivering his home, but he yielded nothing.

The girl clinging to him was trying to reach his neck, seeking to draw him down, to kiss his gaunt lined cheek, it seemed. And he did stop. They saw his left arm swing the rifle down until he was clasping Aurelie, listening to her, moved by her. Then from the groups of men about the cottage, who could not see what those on this side could see, came the crash of another volley. From the fence Janet saw Curran running on, reaching out his hand, and then stopping to stare through the thickening smoke about the cottage.

Janet knew a great silence had come. Van Hart's line of men had stopped. They were staring—all the hundreds of people were staring. Janet knew Lindstrom was down, riddled by the deputies behind him. And that Aurelie had fallen not twenty yards from her old home. The roses she had clung to as she ran lay red and scattered about her on the frozen clods. Curran was kneeling by her. And the silence held as if earth and sky—the gray lonely land with a glint of sun through the clouds—had hushed to hear, had hollowed to hold the agony that broke from Curran's heart.

When Janet and Arne reached them, Curran had turned Aurelie's face upward. Curran himself was bloody from a tassel of a wound torn across his forehead. Men were in and about the bullet-swept and burning house, kicking away the barricade of boxes

from the door. Under the window they found Ladeau dead, his lips forever sealed, and in another room lay Albert the pedler, his piteous life come to the inevitable nothingness. The woman and children, burrowed in the cellar, cold, starved, were unhurt.

But out on the frozen field a group had formed. Curran knelt to watch his child's face. Harlan had dismounted and was staring. He could not speak as Curran wiped the blood from his eyes and muttered:

"She kept crying for you to stop. Couldn't you see? Couldn't you hear? Crying to you, Harlan, to stop. That she loved you—with all her soul she loved you!"

The other man's lips moved uselessly. Then he turned to the others. "Your machine, Arne! Quick!"

Stooping, he seized the girl's body. The father clung to her and it was as if the two were fighting for her possession. Then Harlan whirled back, with the blood from her lips staining his shoulder. "Keep back, Wiley. The machine—quick . . . Home." And as they all ran, Curran trying to keep her hand in his, as it hung from Harlan's arm, the younger man kept muttering: "I didn't know—God help me, Wiley —I didn't know!"

They thrust Old Michigan aside in the car and were in. The two men seemed again struggling to hold her, as the machine ground off through the field. Janet was conscious of the awed white faces—thousands of them, it seemed—along the roads to town. Only they knew that "Michigan's girl" was being borne from her old home now shot-riddled and burning, and that the outlaw of the Pocket was dead. They could not hear

Mich's bewildered mumbling in the car, or Wiley Curran, as he shifted his child's body from the widening pools of blood on the cushions, whispering: "Calling to you, boy, just kept on going—calling that she *loved* you!"

The car was in the Van Hart yard. Harlan dragged his burden from them, silent, fierce with possession. He laid her on a bed on the lower floor before his mother knew of their entrance. In the hall Janet Vance was trying to comfort Michigan who babbled on about his little girl—the little girl he had done brought upriver. They were trying to take her away from him—they would not let him touch her hand. The Yankees had killed her, someway or other.

The judge's wife touched Harlan's shoulder as he knelt: "Telephone for the doctor," he said—"for Brown and Lenberg both. And a nurse. Go!"

He stopped the question on her lips, a young Cæsar grasping power as her Roman matron's pride in him would have had. She turned and went out without word to the telephone. In the hall she found Michigan, a shaggy animal tortured beyond further outcry, swaying his head and whispering: "Done come—done come, Lord!"

When she went back the two men were by Aurelie's side. They had been muttering to each other. Curran was staring at the younger.

"You knew—last night? How could you know?"

"Father told me. And Tanner— We choked it out of him. And no one else knows, Wiley. Ladeau is dead—and Tanner dares not speak. I'd swing him to the pen—as I'll drive him out of the county!" Then

Harlan's new-found wonder broke again. "But your little girl, Wiley!"

"Yes—God help me. I let her grow up any way—without care, without love. Just fighting her own way, always! I never could understand what moved me so about her—the delight she gave me. And you, boy—you *thought*"—he whispered it—"she'd come between us! Why, she loved you always—put it away in her mighty pride—but loved you always! Why, with all her laughter and her playing I never dreamed of loving her as you did. Oh, the wonder of it! She led me on to her land of joy!"

"Be still!" the younger man muttered. "She's trying to say something. *Home!* She's home now—" Harlan's eyes went to his mother cool, fair, listening by the bedside; he slipped his arm down about Aurelie's head to watch the fleck of crimson on her lips. "Home, mother!"

The mother put her hand upon his shoulder; the other on Aurelie's brow. "You'd better go now. The doctors are here. She's shot low in the side. Will you leave her a moment?"

Curran was moving to the door. But Harlan, as he tried to rise, found Aurelie's fingers stealing through his hair; he was listening to his name upon her lips.

Mrs. Van Hart was with Curran as he passed out. With a gesture she held out her hand to him. "There are things beyond us all, Mr. Curran. Deeps of life that move and sweep us all to things we have never dreamed—that we can not evade or compromise. And so we accept—with courage and with gladness. I am sorry—humbly sorry . . . will you believe me?"

He looked long at her and his face did not soften.

"A word from you—a kind word—any little gracious act would have changed it all. Would have given her to Harlan long ago and saved us this. It's hard to forget"—his brief smile came bitterly: "All this life of hers that you held cheap, unworthy—her love for your son kept her good and fine and simple through it all . . . and that meant *nothing* to you."

"I'm sorry," the mother whispered. "He will have his way—and we accept. Some day shall we tell her all?"

"Yes. But not now."

"Why not now?" The mother stirred in the doorway.

"She is not so badly hurt, they say. And Harlan is trying to explain. What is greater than the truth for her?"

Curran stared at her, holding her cool fingers for an instant, then looking in the half dark of the room.

"Tell her?" he muttered. Then drew back. But a sound from within came to him. Aurelie's tired smile had ended in a sigh with Harlan's murmurings. The physicians had stood apart.

Curran went in. The mother in the hall, coming nearer from the telephone presently, heard a cry, then all their voices low and awed. She looked in as she passed, for she would not enter. The men were on either side the bed, holding Aurelie's hands. Mrs. Van Hart could not hear what they said, the girl lying white-faced and still, and the men bending to her.

But after a while Curran rose and came out. The

mother in the hall saw him pass, and the glitter of tears was on his cheeks. He found Janet in the window-seat as he reached the door. The mother heard his voice rise joyfully.

"She said that dreams come true, Janet! Yes—good dreams, child dreams, like those that sent her out to find and love me. Oh, you should have heard her say it, Janet! *Father*—the proudness of it on her lips!"

Janet went with him out into the bleak night.

"Where are you going, Wiley?"

"I don't know. Yes—back to the shop—my old shop. I thought of leaving—selling out, for no one'll ever understand. But I'll stay—I'll fight it out. Face it all with silence—the defeat and questions—and fight it out—for Aurelie's sake. It's safer—it's better for ***her,*** Janet."

They were passing High Street, along which a few people were still coming. The thousands had melted away from the tragic field out the creek road. They crossed the Square, and at the corner of his office he stopped. The lights were coming here and there in the stores, but the place seemed yet deserted, so still that the creak of the frosty trees on the bluff came down to them. Curran paused while Janet tore the hem from her skirt and bound again his forehead where a buckshot had furrowed it.

"What an election day!" she whispered. "I don't think half the county vote was cast, Wiley. But there's the *Mercury-Journal* carrier coming from the interurban—and the polls closed at six."

He had no word as he watched her buy a paper from the boy. When she turned, he had gone in the *News*

office and was looking at the grimy old press and the worn cases.

"Come here, Wiley!"

"Yes?" He went over and looked down with somber eyes to the sheet she had spread upon his desk.

"The Lindstrom story" had five columns of the front. But across the other two was this head:

"Concede Curran's Election."

He looked up at Janet with a mutter: "Election? Didn't they see the *News* last night?"

"No. Come out in the back yard, Wiley."

He followed to where she pointed to the heap of burned paper half-way along the path to his cottage.

"For the first time in fifty years there was no issue of the *News* this week!" She was laughing at his bewilderment. "To-morrow, when the excitement is over, people'll wonder *why*—but they'll never *know!*"

"They—they *elected* me!"

"Of course. And the Tanner board will resign—every one of them!—and Thad, too, from the county chairmanship! Oh, Wiley, we played more than politics yesterday! Ask Harlan!"

He sat down. "Harlan? It's up to Harlan—everything is up to Harlan! He'll protect my little girl—he'll marry her. Janet! How everything about her caught me—appealed to that old wandering romance in me that I never could put by! Eh, I'm forty, now—I'm a damned fool! Well, it's the long straight road, now—for me."

"To Washington," she murmured. "And always on! Oh, Wiley! I'm proud that when the blow fell you did

not cringe nor whimper! You did not run away—you came back here to-night to *work* again!"

He looked at her with a trace of his old humor lightening the sadness. "Because of you, Janet. And Harlan, and a few—just as you've always done! Help—oh, how I need help!" He buried his face in his arm upon the desk: "I need you, Janet. I can't do without you—I never could, damn me—but I didn't know it! Washington . . . I want you . . . You sent me there."

She was laughing in a curious abnegation as she placed her hand down to his head. "You can't do without me, Wiley! When your old boy's romance was at its best, I knew you needed me the *worst*. I saw it in your eyes—always! The new efficient woman—the helper, the companion—"

"The near woman—the dear woman . . ." he murmured.

They did not hold each other in long embraces, gaze into each other's eyes or murmur unutterable things. They were man and woman, tried and knowing. They would see each other with magic clearness, love each what the other loved and work all their lives long for that and for the amazing interest they had in each other. That would be living.

"Eh! Those youngsters!" cried Wiley out of this fine understanding. "There's the problem—it's all before them to work out. Ours is quite done, dear!"

* * * * * * *

When they came back from Washington at the end of Curran's second term—where, by the way he

achieved a far better name as a humorist than a statesman—they drove up High Street and the thought was with them both—how had the problem worked its way out.

They saw Aurelie chasing her two babies over the Van Hart lawn trying to recapture them to place in the carriage. The lively ingenuous wife, still the happy little outlaw in the eyes of High Street, never able quite to hit it off with her mother-in-law, but uncaring for that. At least she had held the adoration of her husband through the uprise of his fighting life, pleased his friends and discomfited his enemies with equal gaiety.

She ran across to meet them, and to lift her black-eyed boy to Mr. Curran.

"We're getting up a charity fiesta—and I'm going to appear at the tin opera-house as Cinderella. I think *everybody'll* come to see me—it makes such a difference who one is. Uncle Mich says at last we done come to the land o' joy!"

THE END

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